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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, October 26, 2020

Day 57

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 26, 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 interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing.

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

The Speaker: Last week I read a brief tribute to former members who recently passed away. This afternoon: the Hon. Mr. Taylor. His family have joined us as we pay tribute to his service.

The Hon. Nicholas W. Taylor served three terms as the Alberta Liberal Member for Westlock-Sturgeon from 1986 to 1993 and for Redwater from 1993 to 1996. After graduating from the University of Alberta with a bachelor's degree in geology and engineering, he worked for various companies in the oil industry, then founded his own oil and gas exploration company. Mr. Taylor was actively involved in politics and committed decades to public service before and after his election to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. In 1996 he was appointed to the Senate of Canada, where he served until 2002. Mr. Taylor passed away on October 3, 2020, at the age of 92.

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

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

Ms Elhard:

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

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Brooklyn.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of the families who have shared the burden of public service. Today I would like to welcome members of the Taylor family who are present in the Speaker's gallery with us. Please rise as I call your name and remain standing until you've been introduced: Mr. Taylor's daughter Patrice L. Taylor and his daughter and son-in-law Susan and Brad Waugh. Please rise and

receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, and thank you so very much for your sacrifice.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also joining us this afternoon are guests of the Deputy Chair of Committees and Member for Calgary-Currie. Please welcome Jack and Tonya Fleming. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, prior to moving to the first member's statement today, I would like to just mention, bring to your attention, that you will find a number of green sheets on your desk showing the permanent and temporary amendments to the Standing Orders approved by the Assembly on October 21, 2020. They are also available on the Assembly's internal website. Replacement packages for the Standing Orders binders are being prepared and will be distributed in the coming weeks.

Members' Statements

COVID-19 Response

Mr. Loewen: Since March, when COVID was recognized on the world scene, governments around the world struggled with how to respond. The responses have been between almost complete lockdown to relatively minor restrictions. I think it's safe to say that if the Alberta government had the ability to start all over, we would have handled it quite differently. We've seen how even our best projections were completely inaccurate.

From the start we should have focused on personal responsibility. But what does that really mean? What that means is that people need to truly understand the dangers of COVID, who it may affect the most, and use common sense to reduce risks to those particular people, and it's the responsibility of government and health officials to clearly identify those risks and those people most at risk.

We now know that by far our greatest risk groups are seniors and those with health conditions. I remind people about Manoir du Lac, a home of about 60 seniors in my constituency, where 10 seniors were lost in a three-week period, but I also have to mention M. Maisonneuve, a 102-year-old World War II veteran that contracted COVID and survived.

Now, spending too much energy and too much time speaking about relatively small-risk groups leaves less time to focus on the most critically affected by COVID, which is seniors and those with health issues. By educating the public on this important fact, we make sure their concerns are directed properly, and we relieve the fear that some are experiencing.

We have different organizations and groups in Alberta that are taking measures to protect people from COVID that are not supported by science and go far beyond anything the World Health Organization suggests. Kids sanitizing hands 14 times or more a day during school hours is unacceptable. Fumigating rooms in the evenings is unnecessary. There are many other examples of municipalities, schools, and businesses that have gone beyond what is considered by even the most cautious experts as necessary.

Small businesses are severely suffering. Tourism businesses have been decimated. People are feeling the anxiety and fear when merely a prudent, common-sense approach is all that is needed to protect those we need to. Scaring people is not the answer. Keeping them informed of the real threats is what's needed. We need to flatten the fear curve. Personal responsibility and focusing on protecting the truly vulnerable is the answer to protecting Albertans and our economy.

Thank you.

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

Early Learning and Child Care

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year the UCP has systematically undermined early learning and child care in this province. The UCP has made child care more expensive, removed quality standards, critically destabilized its workforce, and cut off thousands of Albertans from access to affordable child care, all while providing the lowest level of support to this sector in the country during COVID yet still holding back \$120 million to date of their current child care budget, and they continue to do this even in light of the overwhelming evidence that child care is more important now than ever before for economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, the result is an early learning and child care sector that is in crisis. Operators have to choose between cutting programs and wages or raising fees, and they're losing qualified educators. Parents face rising costs, and women in particular are leaving the workforce because the cost of child care alone makes working costs prohibitive.

In short, the UCP are making the current economic crisis much, much worse for working parents. That's why on Friday the Alberta NDP were proud to release to Albertans an alternative, a real plan that sees early learning and child care for what it is, the strongest investment in the economy, that will boost economic activity far more than a \$4.7 billion giveaway.

Our plan calls for the release of this year's budgeted dollars to the sector. It calls for an improvement of online tools to track where child care is needed versus where it exists. It calls for an early childhood education workforce strategy and the establishment of a cross-sector early learning and child care task force to keep child care strong, stable, and responsive to the needs of Alberta families. Finally, it calls for the full implementation of universal \$25-per-day early learning and child care in all licensed programs.

Our plan, by supporting all families and children to access affordable early learning, would mean billions more to our economy and 40,000 more Albertans working. It's the foundation for an economic recovery for all.

I encourage all Albertans to read our proposal at albertasfuture.ca and engage in this important conversation. We can't afford not to.

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

1:40 Driver's Licence Road Tests

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of my constituents and all Albertans to thank the Minister of Transportation for listening to Albertans and MLAs on this side of the House regarding the debacle created by the NDP and their nationalizing of class 4, 5, and 6 driver tests. The absolute rubbish that came out of the member's statement from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on Thursday shows the complete disconnect he and his party have with average Albertans and the reason for their loss in 2019.

The complaints that my colleagues and I have received regarding lack of access to driver testing since the NDP meddled with the system just prior to being booted out of power have been frustrating to deal with. In my riding alone I have received many calls and e-mails about the disaster the members opposite created. One family wrote to me describing the NDP testing system as a lottery where you have to be lucky enough to find a time to book. Other families note having to stay awake until midnight every night and wake up early every morning for the past few months just to attempt to book a test. Also, with such long wait times, many new drivers have

actually gained highway driving experience as they have been forced to drive all over Alberta just for a simple test.

While the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie claimed the NDP "worked to improve service levels, particularly in rural Alberta, and it was happening," the reality is that the NDP chased away half of all driver examiners before the busiest season of the year. To directly quote one constituent: we are well aware of the website to book driver's permit tests as we go onto the site every night at 12 a.m. to attempt to book a test as well as 7 a.m. every morning; there have not been any local rural tests that have been posted in the last month in St. Paul, Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Vegreville, or Vilna; there have not been any either for Fort Saskatchewan as we've been searching in that location as well.

Mr. Speaker, our government's announcement shows what can be accomplished when you actually listen and respond to regular Albertans rather than following the direction of your ideological, Leap Manifesto supporting union handlers.

COVID-19 Cases in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Lethbridge has the worst outbreak of COVID-19 in the province, yet we are not seeing a plan from the provincial government in terms of action for our community and our economy. We are worried that the outbreak of COVID-19 is spreading through the community and is going to prevent full economic recovery.

Hundreds of people are losing their jobs. They're losing their jobs in agricultural research from brutal UCP cuts. They're losing their front-line jobs in our hospital after doing the heroic work of cleaning rooms, laundering sheets, and preparing food during a pandemic and otherwise. They're losing their jobs at our university. We've already seen dozens of job losses. The massive UCP cuts and their knock-on effect throughout the community will result in hundreds more.

Now, a couple of years back Lethbridge was among the strongest economies in the province and indeed one of the leaders in the country. We were the most stable economy, we had the benefit of public investment and private investments in Alberta, we still have the benefit of diversification, but much of that has been cancelled or cut or made to disappear by this UCP government, who have absolutely no ideas for the economy beyond a failed \$4.7 billion no-jobs tax handout for already profitable corporations.

Small-business confidence in Lethbridge is at rock bottom, and now seniors' income is being chipped away, leaving less to spend in the community. About 20 per cent of our population is over the age of 60 in Lethbridge, and the UCP government kicked spouses off drug coverage, imposing new out-of-pocket costs for seniors' drugs, new fees for home care, long-term care, supportive living. The list goes on.

UCP politicians can't even do the bare minimum to keep the economy going and people safe. The Member for Lethbridge-East wrote to our city council to urge them not to introduce a mask bylaw. Did I mention that we're a city where 1 in 5 people are over 60 and we have the highest rates of COVID in the province? An unfortunate lack of judgment, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East has a statement to make.

Diwali

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Calgary-East I'm proud to join the millions of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains that are celebrating Diwali, known as the festival of lights. As a practising Hindu myself, Diwali is the most important festival, celebrated by

millions around the world, dedicated to the worship of the Hindu goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. Goddess Lakshmi symbolizes wealth, good fortune, youth, and beauty. As victories of good over evil and light over darkness, the main themes of Diwali, it is said to bring prosperity and positivity to the whole world as Mahalakshmi is worshipped.

Alberta stands stronger for those who make their homes here and are part of our culture, economy, and spiritual vibrancy. A joyous festival to all who celebrate. During the festival we always see small lamps filled with oil lit and placed in rows along the parapets of temples, houses, and communities that brighten our autumn days. Houses are decorated with colourful rangoli patterns on the floor, and families will partake in feasts. It is generally a time for feasting, exchanging gifts, visiting, praying, and celebrating relationships and the appreciation of simple joys. It is time to donate to those in need.

The government pays great significance to our culture and tradition. We are fortunate to live in a country that promotes diversity and multiculturalism and allows us the freedom to publicly celebrate. To everyone celebrating Diwali: the Alberta government wishes you and your loved ones a blessed Diwali.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has now been 135 days since the hailstorm that devastated the homes and communities of northeast Calgary. Now winter is here, and this government has not done a single thing to support the people impacted by the fourth-largest natural disaster in Canadian history.

My constituents are worried, and so are the constituents of Calgary-North East and Calgary-Falconridge, who spent the summer watching their UCP MLAs do less than nothing to get them the support they need and deserve. Calls, letters, e-mails, petitions have all gone ignored or been dismissed. How does the government think the people of northeast Calgary, dealing with holes in their walls and roofs, should keep their homes and families warm as the weather gets colder? What does the government think? My constituents have been waiting months to get the damage fixed because the UCP didn't do anything it should do. Mr. Speaker, my constituents can't fix hail damage with the incompetence and inaction of this UCP cabinet.

This government will stand up and defend the international embarrassment that is their war room, they will defend their failed \$4.7 billion corporate handout, but they won't do a single thing for the families who are stuck with the fourth-largest natural disaster in the middle of a global pandemic. Shame on this government, who abandoned the people of northeast Calgary when they needed support the most. These Albertans deserve better.

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

Strategic Aviation Advisory Council

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would first like to thank members of this Assembly for unanimous support in passing the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act. I began writing that bill in a very different world, a world where commercial flights connected us to 139 destinations, attracting over 25 million passengers annually, a world of opportunity. Much changed in the past year, but even then I knew that Alberta could thoughtfully and deliberately improve our competitiveness through global leadership in aviation.

A simple vision, a vision to bring industry professionals together to share knowledge and expertise around one table, providing advice towards sectoral recovery, consider key strategically initiated cargo routes, strengthening our emerging leadership as a logistics hub or perhaps leading the world in applied drone technology: initiatives where this council's voice will make a difference. Yet our borders remain virtually closed to international travellers, decimating travel and tourism and critically undermining our major airports and airlines, not the least of which is our beloved flag carrier, WestJet.

COVID-19 has made it clear that now more than ever we need to be bold. Through my research and travels across the province I can attest to the limitless optimism for growth within the sector. Historically employing tens of thousands of Albertans and contributing billions to our GDP, there is incredible potential for new investment, job creation, and the re-emergence of our proud and storied aviation history.

This determined council will undertake strategic research, engage in thoughtful and insightful planning, and make focused recommendations around air services, global connectivity, and emerging technology. So I put this call to industry leaders to lend us their experience and put their name forward for this high-flying cause so that we may work together with the Premier, ministers, Invest Alberta Corporation, and other organizations to not only be focused and strategic but to support our government as we commit to bringing Alberta's recovery plan to life one investment, one job, and one sector at a time.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Worker Strike

Ms Notley: Today thousands of health care workers walked off their jobs because of the chaos and disrespect of this government: more than 25 hospitals impacted so far in a pandemic. These front-line workers have been working double shifts, putting their lives and the lives of their families on the line for Albertans. Instead of "thank you," this government threatens to fire 11,000 of them, calls them overpaid, and says that the work they do does not matter. Exactly which member of the UCP brain trust over there is surprised that these workers have had enough and are finally standing up for themselves?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I was very disappointed to hear this morning that a number of health care employees have taken to illegal strike action. I was very, very disappointed in union leadership for putting patient care at risk and jeopardizing the efficient operation of our health care system at a time we desperately need it. I'm calling on all health care workers to get back to work so they can work together with this Health minister and the Health department in delivering world-class health care at a time of a pandemic.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, illegal, eh? You know, this government is being taken to court for passing countless pieces of illegal legislation that attack every front-line health care worker: billions of dollars cut from health care, fighting with doctors, threatening nurses, privatizing services and telling 11,000 of these staff that they're going to lose their jobs. These are government decisions, not these workers'. They are tired of seeing the care they provide

and the work they do jeopardized over and over. When will this government realize that Albertans don't want this chaos and stop with this plan to fire 11,000 front-line health care workers?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true, and I'm happy to be able to stand and reply again to the NDP's continued campaign of disinformation. Our primary concern is ensuring the health and well-being of patients, which, as the Minister of Finance admitted, was unfortunately put at risk this morning. AHS is going to ensure that our hospitals remain open and that people get the care that they need, and we as a government will continue to fight for patients and fight for increasing access for patients in this province, and we'll fight just as hard as the NDP fights for the six-figure salaries of their union bosses.

Ms Notley: The 11,000 workers they plan to fire make on average \$22 an hour. It's you folks with the six figures.

Now, nonetheless, this is their fault. I have lost count of the laws passed by this government attacking front-line workers. I've lost count of the court cases resulting from their relentless attack on their rights. This government hasn't met a front-line health care worker they didn't want to cut, fire, or throw under the bus. At the end of the day, though, it's Albertans needing care who are hurt the most by your attack on their health care. Why won't this government stop picking fights and focus on protecting Albertans' health care?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and let me set the record straight for the member. She's lost count because it's at zero. We have not cut health care. In fact, we're spending more than the NDP ever did, record amounts in the history of this province and more per capita than any other province. The NDP: again, let me point out their hypocrisy. They contracted out 80 per cent of our continuing care beds. They contracted out surgeries to 43 different clinics throughout the province. They contracted laundry out for 68 per cent of the province.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Shandro: We're doing what they did, and now they're crying out, Mr. Speaker. It's time for people to point out to the NDP their hypocrisy.

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

Education Funding for Students with Special Needs

Ms Notley: Britlynn Keys is 13. She has autism. She's nonverbal. She couldn't return to class this fall because she can't wear a mask and she doesn't understand the need for physical distancing. Instead of support, she was sent home. Her school dropped off a banker's box of curriculum and told her they couldn't afford to help her learn. Her mom was forced to use her deceased husband's life insurance to hire her own private EA. To the minister. You claim to protect the most vulnerable, but your cuts are directly hurting Britlynn. Why are you failing her?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I just want to share with you that if school authorities are not restoring services or hiring the staff they require, they do this in spite of having an additional \$120 million across the province in additional budget for this year. Under the old model we saw students who were going into the higher grades decline in the supports that they received, so with the new

specialized learning supports funding they receive over half a billion dollars more across the province so that supports can be provided right through from kindergarten to grade 12.

Ms Notley: Hayden Thibodeau is four years old. He was born deaf. This minister's changes to PUF meant that Hayden was 16 days too old to receive speech therapy in his public school. Now his parents are paying for a private school. Harrison Wigmore is five years old. He has a genetic condition which causes language delays. This minister cut off a full year of help from a speech pathologist, and they can't afford to hire their own. To the minister: why is there \$4.7 billion for corporations, but you're cutting critical supports that impact these kids for a lifetime?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in the House before, program unit funding continues to be a cornerstone of our funding model, the new funding model. We are one of the only provinces to fund early intervention at a very young age of two years and eight months in Alberta, and I'm very proud of that. Early intervention is critical to ensuring future success for our children, and with the new funding model we ensure that there are no gaps in the service for children.

Ms Notley: Not true.

Minister, this is Britlynn, this is Harrison, and this is Hayden: the faces of the children that you are hurting.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Notley: I'm going to table these documents, and I hope that the minister takes the time to look at their faces. It's time she stopped denying the facts, denying their stories, and denying their pain, pain she is causing. Minister, at the very least will you do us all a favour and never ever again try to pretend that you have the smallest amount of concern for the vulnerable children of this province?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: I do note the points of order that were called at 1:56 and again at 1:57. I also should note a point of order that was called by the Deputy Opposition House Leader at 1:54. I'm sure that this particular point of order can be dealt with no matter what the reason might be. A prop inside the Assembly should not be used.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eligibility for PUF has not changed, and the funding cap does remain at \$25,000. Our changes that were made do close the gap, ensuring that no child falls through the cracks, especially when they transition from kindergarten to grade 1. As I said earlier, I am a rehabilitative practitioner by profession, and I understand that early intervention is essential for a student's success. We are doing everything possible to ensure that our students are successful not just in preschool but also from K to 12.

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

Ms Notley: She's doing everything possible to make sure that those three kids I just showed her pictures of are not going to succeed.

Cenovus Energy Acquisition of Husky Energy

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the news that Cenovus is acquiring Husky is making many of the Albertans who work for them both very, very nervous. We all know in the face of the oil price crash and the

pandemic that these companies are going to have to become leaner, and they will do so for the future. But what we cannot forget is the impact on people. This deal means more layoffs are coming to Calgary and across this province. Has the government been advised of how many Albertans will be fired, and can they please advise this House of the exact numbers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy is rising.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consolidation is not unprecedented nor unexpected in these tough economic times. I'm not surprised that the NDP wouldn't understand that. They didn't understand the energy sector when they were in government, and nobody expects them to understand it today. But this is a global phenomenon. It's happening across the world: Conoco with Concho, Pioneer with Parsley, Chevron and Noble, Devon and WPX Energy. This is a global phenomenon.

Ms Notley: It may be a phenomenon; it's also real people's jobs, and I asked her for the number of people that were going to be laid off. Sooner or later they will be advised, and I'd like to know that this Legislature will also be advised. It was a simple question, Minister. Why will you not tell us how many people are going to be fired as a result of this consolidation?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Notley: You are to be advised. Tell us how many are going to go.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:59.

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, it is not surprising that the NDP don't have confidence in our energy sector and don't have confidence in the men and women that work there. They did not support the energy sector in their four years of running this government. We don't expect them to do it now. What this merger demonstrates is the continued confidence that Alberta energy sector companies have in Alberta's economy, in Alberta, and in the strength of the western Canadian sedimentary basin.

2:00

Ms Notley: I would argue that that's not true. The deal only works according to the businesses themselves because they've agreed to lay off hundreds of workers, many in Calgary, to the tune of \$600 million, and here's the kicker. To save another \$600 million, they will stop new investments. That's not confidence, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it is the exact opposite of what they said their corporate handout would achieve. No new investments. What we need is diversification. We have no plan. When will this government finally give Albertans a real plan for diversification and a real plan for job creation?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, our industry, our energy sector, is in the position that it is in today because of four years of inaction by the NDP government. Our industry here in Canada is in a position versus the United States of relative worse condition because we couldn't get pipelines built. During four years of the NDP government we saw two pipelines killed. We saw every other pipeline project delayed. That's making it difficult for recovery, but I have confidence in the energy sector. They have confidence in the energy sector. It's too bad the NDP doesn't.

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

Health Care Worker Strike

(continued)

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For well over a year Alberta's front-line health care heroes have been told that they don't matter, their jobs don't matter, they'll be fired soon, likely once the pandemic is over. They've been told that they don't deserve a pension. They've been told that they don't even deserve a voice. Workers are responding to that by walking off the job today. To the Minister of Finance. You doubled down on attacking health care workers during a pandemic. My question is simple. What were you thinking, and what are you thinking now?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say this on behalf of the government of Alberta, that we greatly appreciate the effort of all health care workers, every public-sector worker in the province, as they deliver health care and other services during this very difficult time. I'm also very disappointed in union leadership that would incite workers to illegally walk off the job this morning and jeopardize the health of thousands of patients across the province.

Ms Gray: The ones jeopardizing the health of Albertans are sitting on the government side. This government has talked openly about firing 11,000 of these front-line health care workers. Mr. Speaker, these are people washing laundry, making food, disinfecting rooms where we know COVID-19 is present. These workers, these very brave souls, have put their lives on the line for nine months now during a global pandemic, and the government won't even tell them if they'll get to keep their job when it's over. To the minister: will you reverse course today on your plan to fire 11,000 health care workers? Yes or no?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we just heard from the Minister of Health that they are going to very carefully and thoughtfully proceed with contracting out services that make sense. That will bring down our cost of health care service delivery in the province so that more dollars can go to front-line service delivery. We have a health care budget that is a record budget in the province of Alberta. The Minister of Health is making key moves to deliver more efficiently and effectively, and I support him in that effort.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what we have right now is absolute chaos, and it lies directly at the feet of that minister and the feet of the Premier. When workers are left with no other choice, when their backs are against the wall, they will take action. Alberta has seen this before. Previous Conservative governments learned this lesson the very hard way, and we know that it does not have to be this way, Minister. This government chose to threaten, to bully, to use unconstitutional legislation to try to break workers and create chaos in health care during a pandemic. Will you listen to the opposition, listen to the workers, and end this chaos today?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the only individuals that are creating chaos today are the members of the opposition, with misinformation, and union leaders, who are inciting their workers to walk off the job illegally and irresponsibly. I'm calling on all health care workers to get back on the job, continue to deliver services to Albertans at this critical point in our history. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has the call.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 15 the delay to public-sector bargaining expired. Some union leaders have chosen to go back to the bargaining table in the midst of a pandemic. The leadership of the United Nurses of Alberta chose this option. Now just 11 days after the end of the delay to bargaining, we see what is known as a wildcat strike across the province. To the Minister of Finance: how has government been working in good faith in the recently restarted negotiations? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Finance has the call.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our primary concern is ensuring the health and well-being of patients, which has been put at risk this morning by this illegal strike action. I was pleased to see the Leader of the Official Opposition agree in her statement this morning that patient safety should be the top priority. Our government recognized that health care union bargaining could be disruptive, and that's why we requested a further delay so focus would remain on the pandemic response. Our government will respect the process and bargain in good faith. I hope to see the same from union leadership in the future.

The Speaker: The Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the unexpected and illegal nature of wildcat strikes and given that we are in the midst of a pandemic and patients are limited to two identified visitors and the workers who screen those visitors are on strike, creating undue stress to a young lady from my constituency in the hospital here in Edmonton, away from her family, and given that the government's offer of delaying bargaining with health care workers until the spring was rejected by the union leaders, to the Minister of Finance: how will the government respond to these illegal actions?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the direct employer Alberta Health Services is taking immediate action with the Alberta Labour Relations Board to end this illegal activity. Those involved in this illegal action will be held accountable. We expect that all unions respect the bargaining process, stop putting Albertans' safety at risk, and abide by the law.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. Given the essential nature of health care and given the critical need for a dynamic response to COVID-19 and the need for health care workers to deliver that response, to the Minister of Health: how will AHS ensure continuity of services amidst illegal wildcat strikes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS is deploying managers and other non-union staff to cover for some AUPE staff who have chosen to join an illegal job action. AHS's focus and mine is to ensure that patients get the care that they need, and I'm disappointed that the AUPE's illegal action has forced our hospitals to cancel scheduled surgeries and clinics even as they work to catch up on the back load from the spring shutdown of surgeries. It's unacceptable. It violates the trust of patients and families. We need to put patients first. We need to give people the care that they need, and to do that, we need staff to get back to work.

Chinook Regional Hospital Front-line Workers

Ms Phillips: A couple of weeks ago the Health minister announced he was destroying 11,000 Alberta jobs in the middle of an economic crisis and creating widespread chaos in our hospital system during a pandemic. The UCP apparently believes that Albertans who clean the rooms, wash the bedding, serve the food in Chinook regional hospital in Lethbridge during a pandemic should be sacrificed to pay for a multibillion-dollar corporate handout. To the Minister of Health: how is it that it is now a matter of public policy that these workers in Lethbridge are not considered front-line health workers?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, this is about the AHS implementation plan that we announced in recent weeks. AHS had a review, a performance review, and in light of the pandemic, which has quite frankly changed everything, AHS was directed by us to proceed very carefully with a portion of their implementation plan, ensuring that patient care remains the top priority. But let me point out again that the NDP themselves had 68 per cent of the province's laundry contracted out. The member, quite frankly, is upset because we're doing exactly what the NDP did. We're contracting out laundry, just as they did for 68 per cent of the province.

Ms Phillips: Chaos in health care is not proceeding carefully.

Given that Chinook regional hospital is a major employer for Lethbridge and for southern Alberta and given that our hospital is at the front line of battling both COVID-19 and the escalating opioid crisis, will the Minister of Health advise the people of Lethbridge how many exact nursing and other front-line jobs he is destroying at the Chinook hospital in Lethbridge? The minister could potentially advise this House, or should the people of Lethbridge wait for him to shout it at them on their driveways?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always happy to rise again to answer the NDP's continued campaigns of disinformation, whether it is this fairy tale of physicians fleeing the province or that we are firing nurses. Let me be clear: no net reductions in nursing staff or other front-line clinical staff. That's the truth. The NDP, unfortunately, is having a little bit of difficulty keeping up with it, but the fact is: no net reductions in our front-line clinical staff.

Ms Phillips: Given that, Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge has the highest per capita rate of COVID-19 in the province, given that small-business confidence in Lethbridge is at rock bottom currently and given that people are scared, why is it government policy to open up another front in the war on health care workers, not content with a war on doctors but war on front-line hospital workers and nurses as well, the very people we in Lethbridge and elsewhere rely on to keep us safe in the middle of this pandemic?

Mr. Shandro: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is the hypocrisy and the mendacity of the NDP. They contracted out 80 per cent of our continuing care beds. They contracted out surgeries to 43 surgical clinics throughout the province. They contracted out laundry for 68 per cent of the province. We're quite frankly doing exactly what the NDP did, and we're going to do it to make sure that AHS is more efficient and that patients get more care that they need, better access to the care that they need in this province.

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

Health Care Professional Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The headlines from Saturday's Calgary *Sun* included Alberta's COVID-19 Death Toll Hits 300 and Third-Straight Day with 400-plus New Cases. But turn to page 2. You'll find a big advertisement that reads: Doctors – Escape the Politics; Come Practice in Beautiful [British Columbia]. On one sheet of newsprint we clearly see the UCP's war on doctors in a nutshell. While Alberta faces an escalating deadly pandemic, the Premier is chasing doctors out of our province and causing widespread chaos. Is anyone surprised B.C. is willing to welcome them with open arms?

Mr. Shandro: Happy to rise again and be able to answer the campaigns of disinformation of the NDP and in particular the fellow who's been proving himself throughout the pandemic to be the Roger Stone of Alberta politics. Let me quote the Vancouver clinic owner himself: Calgary for a decade has been the destination of choice for B.C. physicians, with a better billing system, lower taxes, and lower property costs. I couldn't put it better myself. No, Mr. Speaker, recent changes will not close the gap in physician payments or recruitment. An ad bought by a Vancouver clinic owner doesn't change the facts.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that if I am the Roger Stone of Alberta politics, this minister is Donald Trump and given that one of the incentives offered to Alberta doctors is, quote, a collegial work environment and given that the ad itself made news in both Calgary and Vancouver and given that we know that B.C. health authorities are actively and successfully headhunting doctors, nurses, and others to abandon Alberta and move their careers west, how long will this Premier keep trying to deny the departure of our health care professionals that Albertans can see happening with their own eyes in the letters they're receiving from their doctors that are leaving? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Health has the call.

Mr. Shandro: Clearly, I hit a chord, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, with the member opposite and his continued attacks and continued campaigns of disinformation and his sad and perverse obsession with my wife.

I'm happy to set the record straight on the physician file as well. Alberta continues to attract physicians, Mr. Speaker. In the 12 months to September 30 Alberta had a net gain of 246 physicians, in line with the trend of net increases over the past five years. The member's tinfoil hat conspiracy theories doesn't change that.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:14.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that doctors registered does not equal doctors practising, as the Albertans who are seeing their doctors leave, thousands of them, will tell the minister, and given that this government started their war on doctors in the middle of a global pandemic and given this minister himself claimed he wouldn't lay off nurses on the same day that AHS announced they were laying off more than 600 nurses and given this Premier has announced that he is laying off 11,000 front-line hospital workers and even today we are seeing the chaos that this Premier and this minister are creating in our hospitals, when will someone in the UCP have the courage to stand up and say that their chaotic rush to American-style health care in the midst of a pandemic is putting . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Again, whether it's the tinfoil hat conspiracy theories of the member opposite that physicians are fleeing, that we're firing nurses, or his weird obsession with my wife and creating conspiracy theories about her that he's disseminating on the Internet, this is all about one thing, Mr. Speaker. We spend \$5.4 billion a year on physicians, and we need to get a hold of our spending at the current level. To date there is no agreement with the AMA to do that, but we continue to meet with them and work with them towards an agreement. The B.C. government recently announced a new agreement that will raise spending on physicians from \$4.5 billion to \$4.9 billion.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:15.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has the call.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tech companies are setting the pace for the future. Whether in giving modern innovations to traditional sectors like agriculture or energy or the development of cool things like artificial intelligence, the tech sector is crucial to economic diversification here in Alberta. To the minister: how are you and this government fostering the development of Alberta's tech sector, and what incentives and programs are making Alberta the future of tech in Canada?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, thank you, and thank you to that member from Calgary. I just want to highlight that the city of Calgary just broke a record for the amount of venture capital invested into start-up and innovative companies, over \$200 million, and that was after breaking the record last year. The two years that this government has been in office: record-breaking years in innovation and technology in the city of Calgary. That's exciting. We're starting to see that emerging tech sector grow in our province. We've also brought in the innovation employment grant to help with research and development. We've recapitalized the Alberta Enterprise Corporation with \$175 million. The sky is the limit on this industry.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I get goosebumps just hearing that great news. I think that hope is on the horizon for the tech sector in Alberta. I appreciate the minister's leadership there.

Given that in my time as a representative in Calgary-Klein I've had numerous interactions with tech entrepreneurs and industry experts whose ideas for change and economic growth are, quite frankly, inspiring and given that Albertans, most of which are young Albertans, are eager for careers in these fields of the future, to the minister: will you outline to this House the programs and initiatives your ministry is doing to attract and retain young entrepreneurs in this sector?

The Speaker: I might remind the Member for Calgary-Klein that the use of the preamble is not acceptable after question 4.

The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've taken the advice of the Innovation Capital Working Group. Talent is so important to the growth of this sector. We have to make sure that we have the right talent here in the province of Alberta, and that's why today we

brought in the foreign graduate start-up visa program and the graduate entrepreneur immigration stream, to make sure that we are placing – anyone around the world: they want to come, they want to be part of our amazing emerging tech community, they can come to the province of Alberta. We're going to be announcing soon additional programs as well to get young people into this field that has huge potential. As well, the University of Alberta's dean of business recently endorsed our plan.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the growth in this sector is very exciting and given that places like Texas are living proof that the energy-based economy can continue to have that industry as a bedrock for their economy while growing other sectors and given that the energy industry has been shown to be a jumping point to grow the tech industry and create thousands of permanent well-paying jobs, to the same minister: what is this government doing to support the growth of the tech industry and support energy-based initiatives that will benefit all sectors of our economy?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to invest in artificial intelligence and machine learning. A lot of people don't know, but the University of Alberta is one of the top three ranked schools in the entire world on AI and machine learning. We just recently provided additional resources there for that research. [interjections] The opposition is heckling this. I don't know why they're heckling investment in artificial intelligence and machine learning. I don't get it.

In addition to that, we put additional resources into the University of Calgary for quantum computing, Mr. Speaker. That's an investment in the future. This is a trillion-dollar growth industry, trillion with a "t," and Alberta is at the forefront of this area.

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

Support for Seniors

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP has kicked 60,000 Albertans off the seniors' drug plan and is now planning to increase fees for continuing care and home care. These increases come during a global pandemic, when it has been exposed time and time again that we need more government oversight and funding for continuing care. Bluntly, many private continuing care centres have not been able to contain the spread of COVID-19. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: shouldn't you be focusing on improving the continuing care system instead of charging seniors more to access it?

2:20

Mr. Shandro: Well, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the items in the AHS performance review related to continuing care and home care are now proceeding at this time. We started before the pandemic started a review of continuing care, a legislative review of the three pieces of legislation that deal with continuing care as well as a review of our model and how we fund both the 20 per cent of the beds through Covenant and AHS as well as the remaining independent providers. We're going to continue to do that review and then make sure that any parts of the implementation plan will align with the recommendations that come out of that review.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP has already downloaded health care costs onto Alberta seniors to pay for their failed \$4.7 billion corporate handout and given that the UCP has also threatened the

retirement security of Alberta seniors by plotting to pull out of the Canada Pension Plan and given that the UCP now wants to charge more accommodation fees for long-term care and supportive living, to the minister: please tell seniors in Alberta why they must continually pay more to cover the costs of your government's failures in health care and the economy.

Mr. Shandro: I'm happy to repeat my answer, Mr. Speaker. I guess the member was a little bit focused on what was written for her. Let me say again that the implementation plan for the AHS performance review is going to wait until we see the results of the continuing care review, as being chaired by our colleague the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and make sure that whatever is recommended in the performance review and what's implemented aligns with whatever comes out of that review of the continuing care system.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the chaos in the health care system is terrifying for Alberta seniors, especially during a global pandemic, and given that seniors have already lost drug coverage, lost their community docs, and this government is destroying public health care in this province, to the minister: Please explain to the tens of thousands of Alberta seniors already suffering as a result of your attack on public health care: why have you failed to represent them?

Mr. Shandro: Such an attack on public health care, Mr. Speaker, that we are actually spending more on health care than the NDP ever did.

Actually, let me highlight the work of our colleague the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. Mr. Speaker, the mental health and treatment system in the health care system is now 100 per cent publicly funded. Under the NDP only 20 per cent of people could afford getting treatment if they mortgaged their vehicle, if they mortgaged their car, if they sold their vehicle, or 20 per cent got access through Alberta Works. We've changed that, and now 100 per cent of those beds are being publicly funded.

Child Care Funding

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, over the past year this government has made child care less affordable by reducing operating grants to child care providers, cutting supports for families to access early learning, providing the worst level of support in the country to the child care sector during COVID, and increasing fees by up to 150 per cent by cancelling the \$25-per-day pilot program. We know this government's child care budget is not being fully spent to the tune of \$120 million to date. To the Minister of Children's Services: why are you not spending all of the dollars in your budget right now to ensure child care fees don't go up when parents can least afford it?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we'll continue to do is what we've done over the last number of months, which is continue to listen to parents and child care operators to determine what supports they need. We have worked with the federal government to provide nearly a hundred million dollars in COVID-related supports so that child care centres, preschools, out-of-school care centres, and day homes are able to open up safely and ensure that parents can get back to work. We are being prudent with our dollars and making investments where they'll have the biggest impact and also watching some of the trends. As we've learned over the last seven months, it's difficult to predict the future, and we want to be prudent with those funds.

Ms Pancholi: Well, parent fees are going up, Mr. Speaker, while this minister won't spend her own budget. They only wish they had the financial flexibility this government gives itself.

Given that by cancelling accreditation standards, reducing supports for wages and professional development for qualified educators, and removing the northern living allowance for educators in Fort McMurray, this UCP government is reducing quality in the sector and given that all these cuts mean operators are being forced to hire lower qualified educators to make ends meet, to the same minister: is this what you consider support for quality early learning for Alberta's children?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we continue to focus on accessible, affordable, high-quality child care all across Alberta. You know, many of the quality standards that were in place through accreditation, we did commit to bringing those into legislation. Unfortunately, the member opposite refused our request to provide written input into what that legislation holds, but we will continue to listen to child care operators, preschool operators, out-of-school operators, and day home operators as well as Alberta parents to make sure that we can reduce red tape and get this right.

Ms Pancholi: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that a fully implemented universal \$25-per-day program would mean an additional \$6 billion in GDP and 40,000 more Albertans working and given that this government seems to think that it's fair to deny universal affordable child care to 99 per cent of working parents just because 1 per cent can easily afford it and given that this government is giving away \$4.7 billion that is not creating jobs and they're ignoring the evidence that early childhood education is the strongest strategy for economic recovery, to the same minister: will you admit that without affordable child care for all Albertans your government is choosing to leave thousands of them behind?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to support affordable child care for those in Alberta who need it most. Our new subsidy model will ensure that 28,000 more Alberta parents will be able to access subsidy at the highest levels in the country. What the NDP has chosen to do last week again – not once, not twice, the third time – is introduce the same plan, the same plan that Albertan voters didn't support in the last election, based on math that just doesn't work. We'll continue to work with operators across this province to get it right for Alberta working parents and ensure that they can take part in Alberta's economic recovery and get back to work.

Skills for Jobs Provincial Agenda

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, skilled trades are important for Alberta's economy as Alberta's recovery plan is heavily based around people involved in the trades. Alberta's recovery plan invests in infrastructure projects right across the province that are creating shovel-ready jobs right now. The skilled trades task force has given a report that explores ways to ensure that Albertans have the education, skills, and training they need to be successful after graduation and to enter the workforce. To the Minister of Advanced Education: when can we expect the government's recommendations from the findings of this report?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to the member is: very soon. We, of course, do have the final report in hand and are thoroughly reviewing the recommendations and developing an implementation plan because we understand that it's important to move incredibly quickly with respect to strengthening

professional skilled trades and apprenticeship education in the province. Part of that reason is because we understand that we have over 50,000 skilled trade professionals retiring in the span of the next 10 years. I want to thank the member and the co-chair of the Skills for Jobs Task Force. We'll be implementing those recommendations.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that youth unemployment is the highest that it's been in decades and is the highest in western Canada and given that we need programs and opportunities for youth and students to learn employable skills such as the ones in skilled trades and given that many entry-level jobs are requiring not only education but also experience, to the minister: how is your ministry providing young adults with the necessary skills for employment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, focusing on giving our students the skills that they will need to find successful careers in the future is a top priority of my ministry and the government more broadly, and we're doing that through a number of different mechanisms. Of course, we have the Skills for Jobs Task Force, which has provided recommendations on expanding the apprenticeship model of education and revamping apprenticeship education within the province. We're also working with our postsecondary institutions through performance-based funding and investment management agreements to ensure, again, that our students have the skills they need to succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I believe the best way to learn something is by doing it hands on, not just reading about it in a textbook and given that COVID-19 has caused restrictions for apprentices and employers such as limited gatherings, social distancing, and extra sanitizing, to the same minister: have there been issues with apprenticeship and work-integrated learning since COVID-19, and if so, what is your ministry doing to solve this issue? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister is the one with the call.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, on this side of the House, of course, we're focused on facts. We're focused on helping students, unlike the members opposite, who come up with numbers off the back of cocktail napkins. It was really disappointing to hear the Leader of the Opposition last week say that over a billion dollars has been cut from Advanced Education. I'm still looking to find where that was cut from, but perhaps the members opposite may be able to help share. But that aside, we are focused on strengthening work-integrated learning opportunities to support our students. We know the data is clear. By strengthening work-integrated learning opportunities, students have faster transitions to work and they on average earn higher incomes. We'll be working with them to do that.

2:30

Automobile Insurance Premiums

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, over the summer Moody's released reports saying that Albertans are paying, on average, 22 per cent more on automobile insurance. We also know the Automobile Insurance Rate Board has approved rate hikes for some companies

as high as 30 per cent. Thirty per cent. It's unimaginable. Now, Minister, how can you possibly sit back and watch as Albertans shell out six times more to insure their automobiles during a pandemic?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we're not sitting back and watching. I will be revealing some measures that this government will be taking, putting into place later this week. The members that did sit back were the members opposite when all they could do was stick a rate cap on automobile insurance, which actually created a shortage of insurance options for Alberta motorists and in the long term would have led to increased prices. We will not make that mistake. We will deal with this and introduce measures that will bring insurance premiums down.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that insurance has skyrocketed during a global pandemic, when many people are barely driving their cars, and during a recession where folks simply cannot afford these insane increases and given that the minister likes to cast blame for his failure across this House, let's be clear. Insurance rates were one-sixth of what they are now under our NDP government. To the minister: can you explain to motorists why you won't take emergency measures to lower insurance bills during the pandemic? People need answers today, Minister. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a whole lot of misinformation right now, but what Alberta motorists need to know is that, in fact, this government is taking action. Stay tuned. We will be making an announcement later this week. The members opposite implemented a rate cap. When you implement a rate cap in a free-market economy, it results in simply less. The members opposite don't understand that. They don't understand how a free-market economy functions. We will not make that mistake. We will bring credible reforms to our automobile insurance, which will reduce premiums.

Mr. Carson: Given that a report from Fair Alberta in June found that insurance companies in this province were due to net a pretax profit of nearly \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker – insurance companies, once again, are going to make \$1 billion this year in our province – and given that one of the major reasons for this profit is because of the massive year-over-year increases allowed by this UCP government and that minister, to the minister: explain to me why the insurance industry needs to net \$1 billion in profit while many of my own constituents can't even afford to put food on their table or pay for their mortgages. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're not at a basketball game. I encourage you to clap – that's fine – but there's no need to hoot and holler.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to see the members opposite actually aligning with personal injury lawyers in this situation. This government will align with the consumers of automobile insurance in Alberta. We will be bringing forward recommendations, responsible recommendations, that will bring down the cost of insurance and ensure more care for injured motorists. We will not shirk our responsibility like the members opposite did when they placed a rate cap on automobile insurance. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is the one with the call.

Education Funding for Students with Special Needs

(continued)

Ms Hoffman: For months we've been standing with parents of special-needs kids who are coping with the government's cruel cuts to program unit funding. The Education minister continues to claim that funding hasn't been cut and eligibility remains the same, but here's the truth. Because of this minister the Edmonton Catholic school board was forced to accept 581 fewer children in their 100 voices program. That's a 64 per cent reduction, Minister. Surely the minister knows what difficulties her cruel cuts have created for Alberta families. Will she finally put children first and reverse these cuts?

Member LaGrange: As I said earlier in the House, Mr. Speaker, if school authorities are not restoring their services or their programming, it is in spite of the fact that they have received an increase in their funding in this upcoming year's school budget. We have not changed the eligibility for PUF – it is still \$25,000 – and students with severe learning delays will continue to receive the funding at the same level as they did previously. Nothing has changed in that regard.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Edmonton public school board's budget for prekindergarten saw a 76 per cent cut under the UCP and given that the government's cruel cuts have driven some parents to access private schools to ensure their children can get the same supports and resources that they used to get in their public schools but given that this is not a solution for most Alberta families, why did the minister put a \$4.7 billion corporate handout ahead of the needs of kids with special needs?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, under the old model students saw a decline in their supports as they went through their educational journey. Our changes close the gap, ensuring that no child falls through the cracks as they transition from kindergarten, grade 1, outwards. As far as the Edmonton public school division, they have an additional \$14 million in their 2020-21 school operating budget, and as I said earlier, I cannot instruct school divisions to use it. They need to use it in the manner that they feel appropriate. The question is better put to them.

Ms Hoffman: Given that this minister is the one creating huge craters where there once were cracks and given that this minister is quick to defend the racists that she hired to draft her curriculum and given that she's just as fast to defend the \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout but given that this minister can't be bothered to lift a finger to help the families that have been impacted by her cruel cuts, what does this say about this minister that she stands more with Chris Champion and with Husky shareholders than she does for kids with special needs?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that in addition to PUF and in addition to the half a billion dollars that is available to support our K to 12 students across the province through the specialized learning supports, school boards are ultimately the ones that are in charge of utilizing those dollars. It is school boards that are making the decisions to offer services, and those questions need to be asked of the school divisions. We are providing over half a billion dollars of supports to school divisions right across the province to service special needs. It's as important as it was yesterday. It is today. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

School Re-entry Plan and Education Funding

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 caused massive disruptions in every family in this province. For children it meant that many were unable to attend classes, see their friends, and had to adapt to online learning. We reopened schools in September in order to restore as much of a sense of normalcy as possible to families and the lives of students. Can the Minister of Education tell this House what resources our government provided for reopening, what contingency plans are in place, and update on the 2020 year so far?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safety of students and staff is and always will be our number one priority. Every single school authority received an increase in provincial operating funding, roughly \$120 million across the province. As part of the Alberta economic recovery plan taxpayers also funded an accelerated \$250 million in CMR funding, including ventilation upgrades. We also provided \$10 million for PPE and have authorized the use of taxpayer-funded reserves, of which there are roughly \$363 million right across this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. The health and safety of students and all Albertans has been a clear priority for our government throughout the pandemic, and everyday Albertans can take pride in the strength of their response. However, as we turn to colder weather, the cold and flu season is now upon us. Given that for many working parents having their kids in school is essential to maintaining their job or career, can the Minister of Health tell us whether there are provisions being made for students to easily access and receive the flu shot?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. Getting immunized is more critical now than ever before. We've ordered a record number, 1.96 million, of doses of vaccine. We're also adapting our testing approach to accommodate the rising number of people with influenza who need testing. Pharmacists and physician offices are now offering the vaccine to all Albertans five years of age and older. AHS is also offering flu shots through prebooked appointments for children who are under five as well as for their family and household members. I encourage all students, teachers, and Albertans to get their flu shot today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:40

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Cold and flu season will also prove to be incredibly difficult as this year many of the symptoms of the common cold mimic those of COVID-19. As we continue to observe strict isolation and quarantine and prevention measures, to the Minister of Education: can you please tell this House what precautions are being put in place in order to protect students from falling behind in classes due to the need for those students who present symptoms to stay home and isolate?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as part of our school re-entry plan school authorities have been developing at-home learning plans for students who are required to self-isolate. I recognize this

can be a very challenging time for students and families, but the safety and the well-being of the whole, of all of our students and staff, continue to be the top priority, so we all have to do our part. Schools have processes in place so that students can receive teacher-guided at-home learning, which will vary depending on the unique circumstances of each student and each school. Our school authorities have done an excellent job, and we will continue to monitor the situation and make adjustments as necessary.

Thank you.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Renaud: Like every elected in this place, I'm required to debate and vote on legislation that impacts the lives of disabled Albertans, legislation like the omnibus bill the UCP jammed through to cut AISH benefits and give themselves cover to change AISH eligibility. This month I chose to try to keep my living expenses under what AISH recipients live on. I needed some perspective. I'd like to introduce you to my four friends who are helping me.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Julie grew up in the hamlet of Flatbush and now lives in Edmonton. She graduated with a BA in 2007 but has been unable to secure a job to support herself. She has cerebral palsy, uses mobility aids, and relies on AISH.

Don is a boilermaker. In 2005 Don was involved in an industrial accident that, coupled with a pre-existing condition, forced him to give up work. For the first two years following the accident he supported himself using his savings, but that didn't last, and now he lives on AISH.

Tarah lives in Grande Prairie. She's autistic and struggles with depression and anxiety. Tarah augments her AISH income by working 10 hours a week at Goodwill.

Ian was an actor, university student, and taught ESL, among other things, to support himself, and he acquired a brain injury following seven strokes. Ian needs mobility aids and is an AISH recipient.

Every AISH recipient has a unique story to tell. If this government listened to them, they'd tell you that poverty is isolating and dangerous for their health. They'd tell you about the potential that we're wasting because we fail to invest in all citizens. The UCP's failure to consult Albertans before cutting AISH or making ridiculous statements about people not being disabled enough to be on AISH has made a bad situation dangerous.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I've heard from hundreds of Albertans. They're afraid to speak up for fear of retaliation, and they're barely making it. Premier, you're cutting support to Alberta's most vulnerable while handing Alberta's wealthiest corporations a \$4.7 billion handout. How do you sleep at night? Re-index AISH. [interjection] Stop making noises over there to distract.

Vauxhall Academy of Baseball

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the other day I was in a home run fundraiser in Cardston where I didn't get the title, but I did pretty well. It's all thanks to the pro tips that I received while visiting the Vauxhall Academy of Baseball, home of the Jets. While at the

academy I had the chance to talk to some promising young athletes as well as the manager, Les McTavish, about their amazing sports and academic program.

Vauxhall Academy not only builds on an athlete's skills but also provides them with high-quality education, which is working because they're one of southern Alberta's top schools. The success of the school is based on an outstanding professional team with a flexible approach to education, which creates an environment that promotes both academic achievement and social and personal growth.

Athletics is so much more than hitting or dribbling or throwing or kicking a ball. It teaches you how to find balance in life, perform under pressure, work in a team environment, and set and achieve goals. These traits and many more are on full display in Vauxhall because they focus on sports and academics. Vauxhall Academy of Baseball produces high-calibre athletes, high-quality education, and high-quality men. This is evident in their motto: Better Person, Better Player.

The proof is in their results. For example, this year's Vauxhall Academy of Baseball wall of excellence inductee, David Reiniger, was the first recruit of the Vauxhall Academy of Baseball. He graduated and went on to study aerospace engineering, where he now builds rockets, Mr. Speaker. Very impressive. David said in an interview that many of the lessons he learned at the Vauxhall academy are still applicable to him today. Another alumni is pitcher Josh Burgmann, who was drafted in the fifth round by the Chicago Cubs in the 2019 Major League Baseball June amateur draft. These are just two of the countless success stories coming from the Vauxhall Academy of Baseball.

It's no secret that I am very proud of the community of Vauxhall and the Academy of Baseball. This is something that members of this Chamber and staff can confirm as they see me walking around wearing my Vauxhall academy sweater. I cannot wait to see what these young men achieve going on in the next phases of life and on the baseball field, and I wish them all the best of luck.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has an introduction.

Bill 205

Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 205, Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act.

We acknowledge that many of the members of communities in Alberta came from jurisdictions where most countries have recognized the happening of genocide. Some of them have been survivors or relatives or descendants of the victims of these atrocities. Bill 205 seeks to recognize and commemorate the impact of genocide on individuals who belong to the many different religious and ethnic communities of Alberta. It will also promote a better understanding of the causes of genocide as we pay tribute and honour the righteous people who have made efforts and contributions to save lives during the happening of these incidents. At the same time it will help the survivors or their descendants to heal and to move on from the suffering of the past as we express our care and compassion in welcoming them here.

Another significant feature that this bill seeks to introduce is the spreading of awareness about the past atrocities, for it will help in the prevention of the same incidents happening in the future. Alberta and Canada have been standing up against discrimination,

hate, racism, and all similar acts that cause prejudice to any person. We are highly regarded for the promotion and defending of human rights.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table this bill for first reading. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has a tabling.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. The Leader of the Official Opposition pointed to these pictures that we want to table. I think it's at this time or Tablings to the Clerk.

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall tabling a prop, that I'm sure we'll deal with at points of order.

Are there any other tablings? I have a tabling. Pursuant to section 46(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, C-23 of the 2000 revised statutes, here are six of the requisite copies of the annual report of the Office of the Ethics Commissioner covering the period of April 1, 2019, to March 31, 2020.

Hon. members, we are at points of order, of which there was a bevy. At 1:54 I believe the hon. the Member for Calgary-McCall called a point of order.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), all three of them, in response to a question from the Leader of the Official Opposition. The question was about the current chaos in the health care system, the planned 11,000 layoffs by this government, and that was a serious question, and quite frankly Albertans are worried about that. In response, the minister stated that the NDP privatized 80 per cent of long-term care, 43 per cent of surgeries, 68 per cent of laundry services. I think nothing can be further from the truth. The system we inherited had all those things, so I think the minister used these statistics that are untrue and are likely to cause disorder in the House. I ask that such disruptive language not be used in the House.

2:50

Mr. Jason Nixon: Wow, Mr. Speaker. First of all, welcome to the hon. member, to his new role as Deputy Opposition House Leader. I did see today, of course, that the Leader of the Official Opposition demanded that he call a point of order on something that is clearly a matter of debate. I do understand that she is quite frustrated with her record and the fact that, from our perspective and certainly the majority of Albertans' perspective that fired her, her record was terrible as Premier.

With that said, this is clearly a matter of debate, and I suggest the hon. member doesn't use points of order to carry on debate.

The Speaker: Thank you. I am prepared to rule. This certainly is not a point of order. I do have the benefit of the Blues, so for the benefit of the hon. member I will reiterate.

In fact, we're spending more than the NDP ever did, record amounts in the history of this province and more per capita than any other province. The NDP: again, let me point out their hypocrisy. They contracted out 80 per cent of continuing care beds. They contracted out surgeries to 43 different clinics throughout the province. They contracted laundry out for 68 per cent of the province.

And a point of order was called.

I would encourage the hon. – let me join in welcoming you to the House leadership in your new role as Deputy Official Opposition House Leader, but I would encourage you to grab your *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 516, and double-check on the definition of a dispute of the facts; as well, page 639, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, where it encourages members to not continue debate through the use of points of order, because that's exactly what we have here. This matter is dealt with and concluded.

I had another point of order raised at 1:56 by the hon. the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Exhibits

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the benefit of you and the table, I believe I have three in a row. I think I could deal with them in two, one now and then the other two probably put together. I rise, first, on the point of order at the time that I rose on the question in regard to the Leader of the Official Opposition, who was clearly using props inside the Chamber, saying constituents' names, taking the picture, then pointing it towards the minister and showing it. Of course, *Beauchesne's* 501 is clear: "Speakers have consistently ruled that it is improper to produce exhibits of any sort in the Chamber." I would also refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, page 617, where it says:

Speakers have consistently ruled that visual displays or demonstrations of any kind used by Members to illustrate their remarks or emphasize their positions are out of order. Similarly, props of any kind have always been found to be unacceptable in the Chamber.

The Leader of the Official Opposition is a former third-party House leader, a former leader of a third party inside this Chamber, a former Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition now, Mr. Speaker, and I believe the longest serving member of this Chamber. She knows full well that she should not be using props inside this Chamber, and I believe that they should apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The Deputy Official Opposition House Leader should he choose to respond.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the question related to PUF funding, and it related to individuals with disabilities. It was the intention of the Leader of the Official Opposition to have those pictures tabled for the review of the minister and for the benefit of the government. That was the reason in this specific circumstance, because the question was relevant to disabilities and the pictures were, I guess, clarifying the situation that the leader was referring to. That was the reason the leader used those pictures, just for the benefit of the government.

The Speaker: I appreciate your intervention. Having said that, on page 617, as the Government House Leader has indicated – and I think that this is the important part here – the difference between a prop and a document is that "Members may hold notes in their hands, but they will be interrupted and reprimanded by the Speaker if they use papers, documents, or other objects to illustrate their remarks." Now, the Leader of the Opposition may have had many good reasons to want to use a prop, but that doesn't change the fact that the rules state that she may not use papers, documents, or other objects to illustrate her remarks, which is what she did today, which is why you can withdraw her actions and apologize on her behalf. And I would encourage her, if she would like documents like that

to be tabled in the future, that she not use them as a prop as it may make them inadmissible to tablings.

The hon. Official Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: Thank you. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

I would just like to encourage all members of the Assembly on how easy a withdrawal and an apology actually are. Well done.

The Government House Leader.

Point of Order Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For these two points of order I will refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, page 610, remarks addressed to the chair, which says:

Any Member participating in debate, whether during a sitting of the House or a Committee of the Whole, must address the Chair, not the House, a particular Minister or Member, the galleries, the television audience, or any other entity. Since one of the basic principles of procedure in the House is that the proceedings be conducted in a respectful manner, Members are less apt to engage in heated exchanges and personal attacks when the comments are directed to the Chair rather than to another Member. If a Member directs remarks toward another Member and not the Speaker, the Member will be called to order and may be asked to rephrase the remarks.

Mr. Speaker, there are several examples of my concerns in question period today. I hesitate to rise on it, but we are starting to see a pattern, from our perspective certainly, from the Leader of the Official Opposition in her questions at the time that I called this point of order. You have the Blues, and I do have a transcript – sometimes ours is different – as follows from the Leader of the Official Opposition according to the transcript that I have: "Minister, at the very least will you do us all a favour and never ever again try to pretend that you have the smallest amount of concern for the vulnerable children of this province?" There are several other examples like that throughout the question exchange between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Minister of Education.

While I understand, Mr. Speaker, that all of us from time to time forget to speak through the chair, clearly, from my perspective, there was a pattern of that today from the Leader of the Opposition. I think it would be appropriate to remind the House to speak through the chair as it does make things less personal and would be less likely to cause chaos during debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that all the questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition were through you, and they were directed at the Minister of Education. In that case she referred it to that minister and asked the minister to answer those questions.

The Speaker: I appreciate the interjections. I think that it's important to note and perhaps timely, a good reminder. While I won't find a point of order on this particular occasion, I think that at the start of a legislative session it's a good reminder. I have an example here in the Blues as well, shortly prior to the Government House Leader's point of order. "It was a simple question, Minister. Why will you not tell us how many people are going to be fired?" I encourage all members of the Assembly, when asking questions, to

work towards depersonalizing the debate and speaking through the chair.

However, this is not a point of order at this point in time. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:14 and 2:15 the hon. the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader called a point of order or two.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). At that time my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre was asking a question of the Minister of Health. The question was about doctors leaving the province and some advertisements in British Columbia that were offering Alberta doctors to come to British Columbia. That was a serious question about doctors leaving the province. It's a huge cause for concern in the health professionals' community and in Alberta communities in general. Instead of responding to the question directly, the Minister of Health engaged in allegations like that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has some kind of obsession with his family member and he's spreading conspiracy theories and all those kinds of things.

3:00

I think those kinds of allegations fall squarely within the purview of 23(h), which says, "makes allegations against another Member", or (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder" and (i) as well, which says, "imputes false . . . motives to another Member". I think the member's question was directly relevant to the government policy, an issue within the purview of the Minister of Health, and what the minister engaged in was just allegations that were directed personally at the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise, and from our perspective, certainly my perspective, this is a matter of debate. It's unfortunate to have seen the Member for Edmonton-City Centre within this Chamber continue to put forward an Internet conspiracy theory, which he has raised inside this Chamber, that the hon. the Minister of Health's spouse owns a private insurance company that would benefit from the AHS implementation plan as well as benefit from insurance coverage associated with seniors' benefit decisions that are made by this government. That, in fact, is not true. It's unfortunate, again, to see the Member for Edmonton-City Centre continue to say that.

I know from the perspective of the Health minister that he finds those constant comments from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre about his wife to be perverse and a little bit weird. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I find it a little bit weird, too, and if the member across the aisle continued to speak about my wife continuously, about things that are not true inside this Chamber, I likely would find that weird. That, of course, has resulted in attacks on that member's spouse up to and including death threats. It's unacceptable for that to take place and, quite frankly, disgusting that the NDP participate in that behaviour.

With that said, though, this is a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker, and clearly we should move on.

The Speaker: I think one thing that we can all agree on is that we should move on from this sort of language on both sides of the Assembly. I might point during the exchange to the hon. the Member for Edmonton-City Centre as well as the Minister of Health, that a point of order was raised on a number of occasions

and in particular to the use of language like "tin foil hat conspiracy," "weird obsession with family members." I think that it would be advantageous for decorum on a broad scale if all members refrained from lines of questioning similar to this.

I also would just like to draw everyone's attention to a point of order that was ruled on May 10, 2017, when the hon. the then Minister of Environment and Parks and now Member for Lethbridge-West used similar language and at that time was asked to apologize and withdraw for that, particularly around this making accusations of tin foil hats and conspiracy theories on either side of the Assembly.

So while I won't find a point of order in today's question period, I think that if anyone is lying awake tonight, they might just take a moment to read from May 10, 2017, on page 972 of *Hansard* that day as a reminder from previous Speakers about raising the level of decorum and making accusations against other members in the Assembly. It's no good for anyone and doesn't help with the decorum.

I consider that matter dealt with and concluded, and we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

The Acting Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 204 Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and thank you so much to all my good friends in the Legislature here today. I'm here to rise to speak on my private member's bill, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. As the sponsor of this bill I'm glad to see the progress of this bill through our Assembly on this crucial piece of legislation.

In 2017 we saw the former government put in this bill, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, which in essence allowed one company to have special treatment, and that special treatment was that they could compensate people for donating plasma. Now, plasma, as anyone may or may not know, is actually used in medication now. It's become a very effective way of delivering medication to our bodies. They take plasma, which is approximately 55 per cent of our blood volume – this is the fluid, the medium that carries things like our blood cells and our proteins and other things that we need to survive. Through science we are finding that we can do things to it: we can add more blood cells to it; we can add different proteins; we can add other medications and other solutions that resolve a lot of our health issues. People who are immunodeficient heavily rely on this. People who have blood disorders are heavily relying on this. These are the groups that I have spoken to that are concerned about this and want to see my private member's bill pass.

What it does is that it allows these private companies – and to be clear, these private companies, which others may insinuate are international corporations, which they are. But what our audience needs to understand is that these are pharmaceutical companies, biotech companies, and they create medication. This medication is used to treat a lot of our ailments. Now, unfortunately, a lot of these

products are only available from places like the United States and Germany, and the reason for that is that they're the only nations that allow for people to be compensated for their plasma donations to these private companies. Evidently, we purchase a lot of these products back from these American and German companies and the few others that do provide this product to the tune of about 8,000 people, I believe, off the top of my head: the number of Albertans that rely on these medications, these plasma-based medications, to survive, to live a very healthy, productive life.

The most recent crisis, which is COVID, exposed some holes in our armour, if you will, and even though we have the best health system in the world and everything like that, what we found is that we rely on other nations, whether it be China or the United States, to get a lot of these life-saving products, whether they be ventilators or masks or, in this particular case, plasma products that, again, our immunodeficient citizens require greatly.

We should also note that last year, pre-COVID, there was another shortage of these plasma-based medications, and as a result, Canadians didn't receive as much as they could have or should have, which caused a lot of hardships for a lot of Albertans, for a lot of Canadians.

People have asked me: do I donate blood; am I against donating blood? No. And I said that I will absolutely continue to donate blood, and I encourage everyone else to continue to donate blood to our public health providers. I have even provided this product in my previous life. Mr. Chair, as a former paramedic I used to fly medevacs across the province. I used to work at Lac La Biche, Peace River, and ultimately Fort McMurray, working for the various air ambulance outfits. We flew fixed-wing. In a lot of these cases my job was to fly into a destination, like, say, Cold Lake as an example, and to stabilize that patient. They're usually heavily traumatic. They're usually the most serious of the serious that we're transporting by air. In many of these cases I was giving blood and plasma products to great efficacy. Our patients always survived. We always got them to the hospitals, where they continued to run such products.

3:10

I very much understand the value of these products. I will continue to support us having these products, and quite honestly I have never met anyone who is against ensuring that we have clean blood products to give to Canadians in their time of need, especially in these life-threatening emergencies.

Unfortunately, a lot of the rhetoric that people hear – you know, given the opportunity, maybe even some of the members of the opposition will refresh us on some of these arguments against this – is arguments from the 1980s, when we did deal with tainted blood. Fortunately, we have evolved in so many ways. Our professional associations like the lab technicians and whatnot that provide this product: even within their code of ethics they ensure that they're doing things in a hygienic way and a proper way to high ethical and moral standards. Our general laws and nature regarding how we ensure the viability and the quality of things like laboratories, where these products are processed, again, are under our heaviest government restrictions, and we will continue to provide only the highest level of hygienic and proper products through there.

Again, the reason for this bill is the fact that we are at a bit of a shortage in plasma. Canada only supplies about 13 and a half per cent of the plasma products that we need in our nation, and the truth of the matter is that it's really unfortunate that we need to rely on the United States, Germany, Hungary, Chechnya, and others to provide this, these plasma products. I would feel personally more comfortable, as would many others, knowing that these products were coming from Canadians and that they were giving this

product, sharing it freely with other Canadians so that we can ensure that we have the access to these medicinal products.

You know, what's the long-term gain of this? That has come across to me. What do you hope to achieve? Do you hope to achieve selling these products to China, as members of the opposition will accuse me of? I recognize that those are racist comments, but we need to ignore that and stay at the higher level. Yes, my good friends from across the way, as you look at me, aw, so innocentlike – don't get me started. Please recognize that it's on record, your comments, and it's really disappointing, to say the least. But I have faith in you guys that you will pull yourselves out of the 1980s, when we were having tainted blood issues, and that you'll bring yourselves into the 2020s. Not only that; maybe you'll get over other things like really focusing on the environment, really talking about the pollution that Vancouver is pouring into our oceans, all that jet travel that all these people from the Maritimes are doing when they come across to Alberta to work. But I digress, Mr. . . .

The Acting Chair: I'll caution the speaker to speak through the chair, please.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Sir. I greatly appreciate that.

Again, my bill is simply about allowing others to compensate Albertans for plasma, with the hope that ultimately they will set up shop here and that they will start to develop their medications here, and we can show the rest of the world that we can develop all of these life-saving medications and other adjuncts that help support those folks who have immunodeficiency issues and those folks that have blood disorders and so many other medications that are available today and are continually being developed, okay?

I ask and I urge that all members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, regardless of your political stripes – at the end of the day this is a nonpartisan issue, and you have spoken to a lot of patients that rely heavily on these medications that are plasma-based – will support them and us in ensuring that Alberta and Canada have a good, safe, secure domestic supply of these much-needed products.

Again, with that, Mr. Chair, I thank you for the honour to speak in the Legislature, and I look forward to the conversations that we have over the next two hours.

Thank you so much.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

I recognize the Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise in the House today and speak once again to Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo emphasized that a secure supply of plasma is a cornerstone of a modern 21st-century health care system. I could not agree more.

To refresh the minds of everyone, Bill 204 would repeal the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, an ideological piece of legislation passed in 2017 by the previous NDP government, which banned everyone except for Canadian Blood Services from compensating for plasma and other blood products. Mr. Chair, the NDP members opposite will make the argument that Bill 204 will implement an American-style system here. It's ironic that the NDP would make such an accusation, that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo's bill Americanizes our health care system. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In my speech on July 27 I brought to the attention of the House that Austria and Germany, two leading countries in health care, the latter of which has the oldest universal health care system in the world, both allow remuneration for plasma donations. Citizens of both Germany and Austria are entitled to free public health care. Any attempt to discredit this bill by using fear tactics prompted by

the NDP is detrimental not only to our democracy but also to the health of our patients who rely on plasma therapies.

On July 27 the Member for Edmonton-City Centre said that this bill will not do anything to improve the supply of plasma in Canada. Certainly, the member is aware of the fact that approximately 86 per cent of the immunoglobulin we use is made from plasma taken from paid donors, the vast majority of whom live in the United States. Instead of allowing Canadians to be compensated for plasma donations, we choose to buy plasma from compensated American donors. Certainly, he's aware that Canada imports 84 per cent of its blood plasma.

On that same day the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the same member who felt discouraged by my remarks debunking the NDP fallacies, stated that he finds it "just maddening that the time wasn't taken to make sure that appropriate money was put into actually resolve the underlying problems." I would like to make the member aware that an expert panel formed by Health Canada in 2018 concluded that no country in the world that bans paid donations collects enough plasma to meet its demand.

Dr. Peter Jaworski, who spoke at the Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills Committee on July 20, stated that "the compensated model is what supplies nearly 90 per cent of the entire world's plasma supply." He also stated that

in passing the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, the government of Alberta has chosen to pay Americans for their plasma rather than pay Albertans for theirs. This fact makes many of the purported moral objections to compensated plasma collections incoherent. For example, if compensation for plasma is exploitative, as some have suggested, then Canada currently exploits American plasma donors.

What we have here is the NDP actually contradicting themselves. On one hand they speak negatively about the U.S. compensated system, yet on the other hand, they have no problems with us being reliant on it. Our province along with the rest of the country relies on the U.S. for their plasma, which they collect using the compensated model. It's quite ironic. The demand is increasing every year, and Canada is the second-highest user per capita of immunoglobulin. The demand for plasma cannot be met without remuneration, and that has been made abundantly clear by my colleagues speaking in favour of this bill.

Plasma is essential to health services. We use it in medications, to provide transfusions, to conduct medical research that is critical in times in like these. In fact, my own father is alive today because of medication made with plasma. He is alive in part because of the plasma we received from remunerated donors. It's pretty simple.

3:20

I want to commend my hon. colleagues that spoke in favour of this bill. I particularly want to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, a former paramedic, for putting this bill forward because he's seen first-hand how plasma can be a life-saving resource. This bill will save lives, and I encourage all of my hon. colleagues to put politics aside, stop the fearmongering, and vote in support of this bill.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to address this bill because I think that it's very important that we have a reasoned discussion about the contents of the bill. I myself have been a long-term blood donor, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 50 donations. It would be more, but things got in the way.

I certainly think that having blood available and blood products, of course, as is more the question nowadays, to the citizens in the

province of Alberta is critically important. As such, you know, I would support anything I thought would help us to move in the direction of actually having a greater and more secure blood supply in the province of Alberta. Unfortunately, I don't believe that this bill actually works to try to ensure a greater blood supply. It simply is making an attempt, as the previous speaker from Camrose, the MLA representing Camrose, indicated. It's simply transferring who gets paid for the blood donations from Americans to Albertans. So it seems that she just wants to get in on the business, but it doesn't actually do anything to increase the number of donors that are out there.

I think that that's the inherent problem here, that we're not actually seeing the members opposite argue that they can bring more people in to donate blood. What they're arguing is that they just like to have a few \$20 bills spread around the province of Alberta rather than America. I guess on some level there might be a cause to argue that. It just doesn't seem like the basis of a bill, that we would have such a minor economic policy be brought forward here, which really is, you know, the basis of what they're talking about.

In terms of the issue at hand here what we really need to be talking about, what is most important is developing the resource of blood and blood products here in the country of Canada and to ensure safe and continuous supply. I think that it's really important that that is the focus of our discussions and not the trivial things and the quite bizarre meanderings of the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I think we have an actual topic here to talk about, and I think we should stick to that. That is, in using this bill to repeal the quite widely discussed bill introduced by the NDP government previously, can we actually increase blood supply? The answer is no. There's no indication that doing this will actually occur if we repeal the previous NDP government's bill.

In fact, the evidence has been that in the situations in Canada wherein blood has been compensated, we are still at the point of a hundred per cent of the blood that was provided through remuneration was actually introduced through the international market and sold on the market. Again we're back to: it's an economic argument. So if the Conservatives were to stand up and say, "Here, there is an economic argument here; we want to start a business, and we'd like to make a profit," there might be more sense in what they're suggesting, but that is not in fact what is happening here. What we need to be arguing about is whether or not Canadians will have the supply that they need.

Now, the way the bill was designed in the past was that we would be working with the Canadian Blood Services, which has an actual mandate to supply blood, not to make profit but to supply blood and to ensure the well-being and the health of Albertans. We should be working with the Canadian Blood Services to ensure that those services are available here and that the number of donors increases in the province of Alberta.

We also, in introducing our bill previously, were realistic that that's something that's going to take time and that we're going to need to move in the right direction, so we ensured that Canadian Blood Services did have the ability to purchase blood from American or, in fact, any international donors to make sure that we had the level of product that was necessary at any particular time, something that people may or may not like, but we ensured that there wasn't a shortage that was going to exist in this country. In fact, there isn't a shortage because we can go to that market when necessary.

Now, what we need to be doing, however, is that we need to be saying that that puts Canada in a very difficult place. We are constantly dependent on other countries for our blood supply, and if this bill had anything to do with increasing Canadian sovereignty

and the supply within Canada, then I might be more supportive of it, but we know from the evidence that it does not. We know, for example, when we had a crisis in COVID and suddenly personal protective equipment, PPE as people often refer to it as, became in short supply, that countries other than Canada were more interested in supplying themselves than in supplying Canada. That's what happens when you start to go into expecting other people to supply your blood products.

What we want to have happen here in this country is to ensure a Canadian supply, and we know that the evidence is that if we start compensating for blood, it does not increase the Canadian supply but a hundred per cent of the product so far has been sold on the international market. So what you're actually doing is that you're increasing the supply of foreign national countries.

What we need to have is that we need to have an emphasis here in Canada on building the Canadian blood supply, which is the purview of the Canadian Blood Services. That is why I've asked in the past, as rightfully noted by the Member for Camrose, that we should be working to work with the Canadian Blood Services to help them to increase blood supply, ultimately moving toward a situation where we have, without compensation, a hundred per cent of the supply that we need. That's got to be the ultimate objective because that will provide us with security, and that will ensure that the services that we have created for the supply of blood in this country will be Canadian and will be focused on health and not on profit.

We know that this can be successful because we've seen these models get successful as they start to get introduced. For example, in Quebec, where they have the Plasmavie program, they have seen dramatic increases of plasma supply in their province, and they're moving farther along. We know that when some members from the Canadian Blood Services, particularly Dr. Sher, came to the committee, he indicated that they have plans to expand services throughout Alberta and that, in fact, in Alberta we are opening up new places such as in Lethbridge to provide that. We know the evidence indicates that as we open up these new sites and we offer more opportunity for Canadians to donate, then in fact we get more donations, so that should be the focus that we have here today.

I think it's important that, you know, we sort of listen to the words of Dr. Sher, and I will make a brief quote. I know I need to keep my quotes from *Hansard* limited, but Dr. Sher said that

Alberta is actually a larger contributor to the national pool of blood donations in its population. Our largest blood-collection centre in the country is here in Edmonton. We have a very large one in Calgary. We're opening a [new] plasma centre in Lethbridge. We have a blood centre in Red Deer. We also have the second-largest manufacturing and testing facility in the country. It just opened up in Calgary, one of the largest and most modern blood-manufacturing facilities in the world. Alberta is a tremendous contributor to the voluntary blood system in this country and always has been.

3:30

It seems to me that the evidence is there, that Canadian Blood Services is very aware of the situation here in the province of Alberta, that Alberta actually provides beyond its needs here in the province, and that they know from the research that increasing the number of opportunities for blood donation actually results in more blood, so they're opening new ones in Lethbridge and Red Deer as Dr. Sher provided in evidence. We know that there is a solution to the problem that the Conservatives purport to say they're trying to address. We know that it is a method which will provide greater ultimate sovereignty and security over blood donation and blood supply here in the province of Alberta, and I think that because of

that, we should move in the direction of making sure that we are doing that work.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford speaking up. I appreciate it. I wish your message was a bit more refined. Like, for you to mention economic policy, for an example – I mean, you're a New Democrat. You don't understand economic . . .

The Acting Chair: Member.

Mr. Yao: Yes.

The Acting Chair: Through the chair, please . . .

Mr. Yao: Ah, through the chair. Absolutely.

The Acting Chair: . . . and stick to the bill at hand, please, not personal attacks.

Mr. Yao: Absolutely. Again, the member mentions the international market on these products. They are one hundred per cent because, again, the only people that process plasma are in the United States, which is the closest nation to us, just across the border there. We get many things from them. We sell them many things. We sell them our lumber, we sell them our metals like aluminum and steel, and then they sell it all back to us because they turn that wood into furniture. They turn that steel into structures and vehicles, and they sell that all back to us. Same with our plasma. You're right. It's all developed elsewhere, but that's the point. We're hoping that they will ultimately develop those medications here.

I don't mean to speak slowly and enunciate my words to the members from across the way, but, again, they keep on falling back to arguments from the '80s. They don't recognize the issues that are very real to us today. They haven't even spoken to any of the patient groups that are supportive of this repeal. That's the biggest shame here, that it's not about doing the right thing; it is pure politics to the folks that choose to oppose this bill.

You know, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talks about ensuring that Canadians will have the supply whenever we need it. Again, it's about getting that product collected here. If these companies can collect enough product, then they will maybe consider developing those medications here.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Again, I ask, I plead with the members from across the way to talk to some of these patient advocacy groups. There are so many people here within Edmonton that rely on these things. One thing that COVID has identified, Mr. Chair, is that these products are needed. COVID has exposed us to the fact that people – has brought the reality of the strict lifestyle that one needs when one is immunodeficient to the rest of Canadians so that we understand these hardships, and we want to get them these very cures and medications and that sort of thing.

The member from across the way talks about evidence. Again, we're still waiting to get that evidence from the members across the way. They preach about a lot of things which are really unfortunate, which don't hit to the core about what this is about. This is about accessing a product so that we can develop it into a medication. It is pure and simple.

That's all I ask, that members truly look at this and pull the politics away from this. I recognize that only labour groups are fighting this. I won't expand on that yet unless I hear more about it, but perhaps the members from across the way can talk about some of the labour groups. You know, perhaps you can quote the nurses of New Brunswick, the union. These are health professionals who have on their website stuff on tainted blood, and they're speaking out against this private member's bill. Perhaps the members from across the way could embrace those health professionals from the far east there, New Brunswick and find out what their concern is with this exactly, when their arguments are, again, from the '80s about tainted blood, about something that no one wishes to have. Maybe you could explain to me what their thoughts are on plasma and plasma-based medications and immunodeficiencies and blood disorders and ask these health professionals: why would they fight this private member's bill? I'd love to hear that.

But, with that, Mr. Chair, I just want to simply say that I hope the opposition will stick to the facts, provide evidence of their issues, and perhaps find a resolve. That's all we're here about, finding solutions and the resolve for these supply issues that we currently have as we are not producing any of these products here in Canada. I'm glad they understand the international community, but I hope they understand how we benefit from the international community. There might be a harsh reality check for them that almost everything that we get is developed internationally, is produced internationally, whether it be something like a cellphone or any technology. Virtually every medication is made across the border. We really have very few facilities that can do this en masse to any great effect here.

Again, I'd just simply ask that the members of the opposition stick to the truth, stick to the facts, and provide evidence and to not emphasize the tainted blood scandal of the 1980s. That is something that we have all learned from, and we're going to continue with those lessons today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe the hon member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 204. Before I get into some of my comments, I think it's important for everybody to realize or to understand that what this piece of legislation does is repeal the 2017 Voluntary Blood Donations Act, and it authorizes cabinet to make transitional regulations arising from repeal of that act.

What it did: the 2017 Voluntary Blood Donations Act banned the purchase of blood and the advertising for the purchase of blood. What this does is change that. Now, I certainly think the member is referring to some of the problems that we've had. I think he said 1980. I'm not quite sure. That was many years ago, and I think a lot of things have changed as a result. I think it's important to frame our comments. Our comments aren't about that we don't think that medication that relies on plasma should be developed or that blood donation or blood collection should be limited in any way. It's not a conspiracy in any way. There are some serious concerns about how you do that. I think it's really concerning to me that this piece of legislation was really only passed in 2017. It's only 2020 now, and I think that we all realize that it takes a little bit of time to measure any kind of success.

Now, I know that some of the impetus of this bill – there are a few different pieces, but one of the things was to encourage collection, encourage donation, and all of those things that are associated with it. So I think that merely to repeal at this point poses

the question: if you're going to talk about science and data, share that with this Chamber. Share it. What did this piece of legislation in 2017 do that led you to believe that it was not on a good footing? What was it that told you that it was important to bring in big pharmaceuticals? Let's talk about that.

Now, we know that big pharmaceutical companies – and they're huge. I mean, these are massive, massive corporations. I could not find any information for a Canadian big pharma, but I'm going to talk a little bit about the United States. They are our neighbour, and they have been using this model for quite some time. Given the government's sort of – “enjoyment” is not the right word – penchant for American-style health care, I think that this information is relevant.

In 2019 – so this is last year – big pharmaceuticals, the top 15 big pharma companies, actually had revenue of \$1.3 trillion, okay? These are very wealthy companies – very wealthy companies – and they control a lot. I don't know if any of you keep an eye on the American-style health care system and what goes on there and what some of the issues are, particularly as it relates to pharmaceutical companies. I would suggest that you'd be concerned about that.

3:40

That aside, my major concern with this piece of legislation, what I'm going to focus on today, is about the model itself. I think that we can understand that in the United States – and that is the system that I'm really sort of talking about – the vast majority of people that donate blood or plasma are people that are poor. That is the reality. The vast majority of people that donate blood and plasma in the United States are poor, usually because they work minimum wage jobs, usually a couple of jobs. They actually donate these products because they're poor, because they don't have a lot of options to make money.

Just, too, I was curious about, you know, what do people – what are they reimbursed when they donate blood or when they donate plasma? Well, people in the United States make about \$30 to \$40 for every donation. That is a \$19.7 billion global industry. Not surprising that lobbyists have been pressing this government to make some changes to the legislation that we brought in in 2017 so that they could introduce some profit. But who pays for this? It is people that live in poverty. A simple gift of life, which really is what it is – I am grateful to every Albertan and every Canadian that is capable of donating, that does so because it is a gift of life. But when we change that and make it about money – this is profit-driven, and then people are reimbursed for that – it becomes more of an act of desperation for people as opposed to a gift of life. Now, you may be comfortable with that, and that's absolutely your right, but I would suggest that you think about what you're introducing.

Interestingly enough, I think one of the members talked about some of the other countries around the world that had had success with this kind of model. I think it's also important to know that there are a lot of developed countries that have banned paying people for donating blood, and there's a reason for that. The industry depends on the blood of the very poor. That's what it's about. Now, I'm not saying that people that are poor or that are not poor would never donate blood. Absolutely, that is not true. I think there are tens of thousands if not millions of Canadians that for nothing for years have been regularly donating. Like my colleague said earlier: people donate because it's the right thing to do, and they are literally giving the gift of life.

However, when you introduce a pay for service, when you introduce monetary compensation, you are going to get more people that are donating. If that's the point of all of this, then just say so. But the people that are going to be impacted are the people

that don't have a lot of options. Maybe they didn't want to donate blood before. They don't have a lot of options. They need another 40 bucks to make it to the end of the month. Suddenly, this seems like a doable alternative.

We have a lot of poverty in this country and in this province, and I would suggest that in the last year, at least, this government has taken steps to increase the divide between the people that are not living in poverty and those that are. Just simply, some of the quick things that come to mind are that this government has reduced rent housing subsidies by, I think, 24 per cent. It is people that are very poor – I'm talking very poor – that qualify for that kind of subsidy. There are 24 per cent fewer housing subsidies. You've got a group of people that are already struggling that now are going to struggle a little bit more, so you're going to introduce a system that says: hey, you can make 40 bucks if you donate blood.

I would also suggest that people with disabilities – and there are a lot of them. I think there are about 70,000 on AISH. We've got about 60,000 people on income support. Not all of those people have disabilities, but there is a large percentage on income support that do. I know that they can't make it in the month for what they get, whether it's \$1,685 on AISH or even less on income support with a core benefit of under \$900. They can't make it, so something like donating blood is going to look very attractive to them to be able to make it to the end of the month to buy their groceries.

When you are living in poverty – I think we can all agree: none of us are living in poverty. We are very entitled; we are very privileged. But people that do live in poverty are faced with agonizing decisions on a regular basis. Do I buy this, do I go without, or do I do this? Do I do this? Do I donate blood so I can afford to get my child a birthday cake? Do I donate blood so I can buy food for the rest of the month? These are not choices that people should make.

Now, there are a couple of things. There's the system of blood donation, that I certainly have concerns about, and then there's the other system, the system that this government is actually doing incredible damage to so that we are increasing the number of people that live in poverty. You're taking deliberate steps so that something like blood donation would seem like an attractive offer. For example, deindexing AISH: that is a cut. In January they would have received \$30 more, in January another \$30 more, probably more.

But when you remove those things and you add the stress of people in poverty and then you introduce a system where blood collection is reimbursed, what do you think is going to happen?

An Hon. Member: More donations.

Ms Renaud: That is actually what is going to happen.

We know that in the United States most of their blood-collection facilities are located in poor neighbourhoods because it is poor people that donate. Poor people often don't have vehicles, so they can't drive, you know, out of their community to go and donate. That is a fact.

Mr. Yao: That's a lie.

Ms Renaud: That is what is happening, that people that live in poverty are the vast majority . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: I hear a point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Sabir: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, the mover of this bill, just called whatever my colleague from St. Albert was talking about a lie. I think the member should know that that's unparliamentary, and he should retract and apologize.

The Deputy Chair: Any members? I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Chair, I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I hear the member and recognize that such language, if it was in fact said, would be something that's not appropriate for this Chamber. I guess I'll leave it to the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo if he did in fact say that. Otherwise, I wouldn't have the ability to speak to that.

The Deputy Chair: Yeah. I think that I, too, did not hear who said or exactly what was said. I think I heard something along the lines of: that is a lie. I would take this, then, as an opportunity to caution all members with regard to inflammatory language. Debates can get heated, et cetera, but we also have to ensure that debates are effective in this House.

I see the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has risen.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Chair, though I would contradict the Member for St. Albert's comments, at this time I just simply withdraw and apologize.

The Deputy Chair: I consider the matter dealt with.

I would also just remind all members of the House to ensure that they speak through the chair. I think we've moved a little bit towards talking directly, and I think that, obviously, talking through the chair helps to depersonalize matters, which can lead towards a more effective debate.

If the hon. Member for St. Albert could please continue.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. We'll move on a little bit. Clearly, that was getting under the member's skin.

We'll talk about Bill 204. Certainly, Bill 204 was debated in committee . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has risen.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing me and allowing me to speak to Bill 204 today. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act, brought forward by my colleague and friend the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Firstly, I would like to thank the member for his extensive work on this issue.

3:50

A critical reason why I support this bill is because it has the backing of patients and patient groups who rely on plasma for various life-saving treatments, and if there's anything that should focus this conversation, it should be that. When the people that it's serving support it, then it's probably a good understanding that that bill is worthy of support.

As you may know, plasma is a blood component that is manufactured into various therapies for patients with particular

blood disorders. The vast majority of the global plasma supply comes from paid donors, primarily in the United States, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Germany, and Canadian patients are heavily reliant on this global supply. Now, the current plasma supply and associated therapies in our province are administered through Canadian Blood Services, and Canadian Blood Services collects less than 15 per cent of the plasma needed to treat all Canadian patients with immune deficiencies. The remaining plasma is purchased from foreign donors, and as a consequence Canadian patients are vulnerable to supply shocks. This is compounded by unexpected crises like, for instance, COVID-19, that showed us just how devastating supply shocks can really be.

Now, in addition to this, Canada is among the highest consumers of plasma and plasma products, consistently ranking in the top three for per capita plasma and plasma product use, so this is a very important issue for many, many Canadians. Taken together, our high demand for plasma therapies and the high dependence on global supply leave patients in this country vulnerable.

Bill 204 is a step forward in addressing the issue of plasma availability for two reasons. In the short term this bill will allow Alberta to contribute to and diversify sources of global supply, and in the long term this bill will allow us to attract manufacturers of plasma and plasma therapies to the province and, in turn, secure a reliable local supply for Alberta patients.

For those who still are on the fence on the concept of compensation for plasma, I want to direct you to the comments of the private groups who presented to the Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills. At their meeting on July 20, 2020, the committee heard from the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization. In their presentation they stated that the plasma collected from Canadian Blood Services only meets 13.5 per cent of Canada's plasma needs. While they support the goal of increasing voluntary donations, this patient group argued that the most realistic path forward needs to include compensation of some kind. It seems to me a very reasonable position.

I want to quote directly from Ms Goulstone from the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization, who said:

In Canada, when we think of and we hear the term "paid plasma," an image is conjured up of conducting things where cash is handed over for blood. It couldn't be further from the truth. The idea of compensation for a donor is not new even here in Canada and is practised around the world. The European Commission for the European Parliament felt it important to distinguish between the idea of compensation and incentive when discussing blood and plasma donors. In this crucial distinction more than half the EU member states, 24, compensate donors in the form of time off work, reimbursement for travel costs, and tax incentives.

The U.S. currently supplies over 70 per cent of the world's plasma supply, and it is feeling the global strain. Emerging Asian markets and growing global demand is moving [and] mounting pressure [is occurring]. Starting in 2018 patients have reported product unavailable for pickup. This is happening in the U.S., the U.K., and now here [in Canada]. Last summer Canada experienced its first-ever Ig shortage when its sole supplier of SCIG, the home treatment of Ig, was not able to meet its forecasted demand. It has taken [Canadian Blood Services] 20 years to build their whole-blood donor base. We do not have 20 years to wait while they build their plasma donor base.

We hope that this committee and this government will do all they can to ensure continued access to immunoglobulin for patients in Alberta.

Mr. Chair, those are the words of the patient group that represents thousands of Albertans and Canadians who rely on plasma therapies to live. As I mentioned before, the reason I support Bill 204 is

because of the patients who support it. For many of these patients, it is literally a life-and-death thing.

The Voluntary Blood Donations Act was introduced by the NDP in 2017. Canadian Blood Services is exempt from the legislation. Canadian Blood Services does not pay their donors for plasma donations. Under the act payments that are banned include "remuneration, compensation or consideration of any value and of any kind, and includes reimbursement for time, travel, commitment or expenditures of any kind."

Bill 204 will repeal this act and will allow both paid and unpaid donations to coexist. By doing this, we increase the opportunities for Albertans to contribute to global supply while allowing the option to be compensated for the cost of time and resources it takes to donate plasma. Patient groups are realistic about the reality of plasma supply in our province and country, Mr. Chair. In an ideal world we would be 100 per cent plasma self-sufficient solely from uncompensated donations, but that is not the case, and we need to be pragmatic. Patients are relying on us to ensure that these life-saving plasma therapies continue to be available.

Plasma donation is a national issue that is in provincial jurisdiction. Alberta has an opportunity to be a leader in this area, just as we have been in so many other areas. Canadian patients are major consumers of this product, and we should do our part to contribute to the global supply. If donors in other countries like the United States or Germany were opposed to compensation for plasma, Canadian patients would suffer. We need to listen to patients. Patients are in favour of this move because it increases the supply of products needed to make life-saving therapies.

In the long term and if more provinces come onboard, plasma manufacturing facilities could be established in Alberta. That would mean that instead of only contributing to a global supply, Albertans' plasma could be manufactured into therapies right here in Alberta. This is a longer term possibility, but it all starts with repealing the ban on compensation.

With that in mind, I want to reiterate my support for Bill 204. I want to thank the patient groups who have voiced their support for this bill. Certainly, my thoughts are with them as many are considered high risk. I hope they have been staying safe and healthy throughout this pandemic.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm honoured to rise in this House to express my support for Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. Before me there were some speakers, especially the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who didn't argue that there is a shortage of supply. There is an increase in demand, but supply is going down. Unfortunately, we're not in a position to compensate that supply. There are a lot of PDMPs, which are plasma-derived medicinal products, pharmaceutical products. These are made these days not only in terms of treatment or prophylaxis but for diagnosis, too.

4:00

During COVID-19 we have seen a surge in the demand, though. There is a reason that especially a country like India is using plasma therapy to cure COVID-19. Of course, it's in the trials, so the trials are taking a lot of plasma. At the same time, treatment is taking a lot of plasma, too. When you look at the supply, as previously other speakers mentioned, 70 per cent of the plasma supply comes only from the U.S.A. There are four European nations: Hungary, the

Czechs, Germany, and Austria. These four nations and the U.S. also supply about 90 per cent of the plasma.

We need it. In Canada we only get 13 per cent; 87 per cent we import. We pay to the U.S. donors, who get compensated for donating plasma, but here in Canada I think Saskatchewan and Manitoba are the only provinces. In Saskatchewan there are two clinics who compensate the patients to donate plasma, and there's one clinic in Manitoba. But if you look at British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec, which constitute about 86 per cent of Canada's population, we don't compensate people who donate plasma.

Plasma, as I think previously speakers mentioned, is a very important part of blood that contains many proteins, including albumin, clotting factors, and antibodies. We can call them immunoglobulins, and these antibodies help to fight infections while coagulation factors, the clotting factors, help our blood clot and heal from the wounds. With researchers studying the impact of plasma transfusion on COVID-19 patients and new uses for plasma therapies and reduction in plasma donations during the pandemic, the need will increase.

As I said before, historically and today we are dependent on countries like the U.S.A. and Germany – we are importing plasma from there – and their donations, the plasma donations, coming after compensating the plasma donors. There are four factors I have seen: first is the regulatory process, second is the compensation to the donors, third is the efficiency in the collection of plasma, and fourth is the number of donors. In the U.S.A. itself 40 million people in 2017 were compensated. They donated plasma. This is the reason the U.S.A. is the main exporter of plasma.

Well, at this time I'll honestly say thankfully that my colleague and MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo introduced this bill to take action on the issue that needed an immediate response. The member recognized that the NDP's Voluntary Blood Donations Act, which prohibited the compensation of any individual who donated plasma with the exception of Canadian Blood Services, limited Albertans' opportunity to contribute to the global blood plasma supply.

Early on, when this bill was first introduced, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo said that a secure supply of plasma is a cornerstone of a modern, 21st-century health care system. The repeal of the Voluntary Blood Donations Act will help patients by making our plasma supply less dependent on international supply, which can be unreliable. This supply can be unreliable at any time during the COVID-19 crisis.

You know what? Experts agree, too. John Boyle, president of the Immune Deficiency Foundation, stated that recognizing plasma donors for the heroes they are and educating the public on the need for more donations are very important. Moreover, this bill ensures the most vulnerable people are not forced to go without their medicine because of ideology or misinformation, issues that are too important in the debate over paid plasma.

Another expert, Kate Vander Mere, founder of Plasma for Life Canada, a patient group that prioritizes dignifying patients, says that the negative impacts of shortages, the anxiety over supply, and the guilt in seeing other patients suffering through shortages weigh heaviest on her patients.

Prior to the pandemic Canada imported 84 per cent of its plasma, with the percentage set to hit over 90 per cent in 2024. According to Dr. Peter Jaworski, the Canadian professor teaching at Georgetown University, global demand will increase by 6 to 10 per cent each year for the foreseeable future, with numbers only expected to increase even more with an immense reliance on nonremunerated blood donations already. With a mere 5 per cent of the world's population responsible for more than half of the plasma

collected globally, shortages will occur, running up health care costs and leaving our patients vulnerable to supply disruptions.

I think we need to leave ideology alone. We are not talking about a nonserious matter that we can play politics on. We're talking about a very serious, important factor, and these medications – whatever the pharmaceuticals are going to produce in the future, plasma will be an important raw material. We need to make sure that if Albertans need this supply – we need to have enough supply. We need to rely on all of the four factors. It's not only the donations. It's the regulations, it's the compensation, and it is also in efficiencies to collect that.

Also – I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford – we need to increase the number of donors. We're not saying that donors can't donate without compensation. They will. I think that putting the compensation with that will increase the number of donors, too. As Dr. Jaworski argues, relying predominantly on five countries – United States, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and the Czechs – that supply over 90 per cent of the world's total plasma supply is what inflates the cost and sabotages those who need access immediately.

Our government always seeks to provide the best care possible to all Albertans because we owe them that. Thus, I stand in support of this bill in addressing a problem that has gone unanswered for too long. It's about time we allow Albertans to be compensated for the time and the resources they invest in giving plasma. This bill is simply in the best interests of all Albertans, and I'm honoured to stand in support of this bill today.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak on this very important proposal put forward by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act, which is a negative sound bite in and of itself. I find a bit of tragedy here this afternoon in that we see certainly a diametrically opposed couple of arguments being transposed against each other, but strangely enough the two opposing arguments are found both within the conservative camp, those famous ideological pillars of conservatism being corporate greed versus citizen volunteerism. In this particular case, we're seeing that corporate greed is spilling the blood on the floor, and our volunteerism ethic, that we see so often heralded in conservative circles, is being totally trampled by it.

Now, we have a system of blood donation in this country, in this province which has been one founded upon volunteerism, relying upon a volunteer base to donate blood. Canadians are rightly proud of that, and Albertans are as well. Indeed, being a long-term blood donor with not as many donations as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford but somewhere around 37 or 38 donations myself, I certainly understand the value of the volunteer system that we have, first of all, under the Red Cross and now under the Canadian blood system. I hesitate to seem instructive to the Conservative government members opposite; however, I think that the rush to judgment on the volunteer system, to adopt a corporate collection system and a paid system for blood donors is definitely short-sighted, and it's exactly the wrong direction that we should be going in.

4:10

It's been cited numerous times this afternoon in debate by members opposite in the government caucus that 84 per cent of blood plasma is imported from the United States, and there's a shortage, and compensated blood supply is 90 per cent of world's blood supply. Well, I take from that, Mr. Chair, that the world has failed miserably

in opposing the corporate rush to control the plasma supply in this country, on this globe, in fact. It certainly is not necessarily the case that we look to those results that exist right now and suggest that the white flag of surrender should be waved in front of the corporate greed that we see wanting to go after our Canadian blood supply system, fully supported by the members opposite in government caucus with this private member's Bill 204, looking to repeal the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, which is a sad day to be in this Legislature debating such a thing because the question as to meeting our blood supply requirements without remuneration is something that perhaps is better addressed by looking at why, in fact, we haven't met those goals.

I posit to this House and to Albertans and Canadians that successive Canadian governments over the long term in provincial and federal Legislatures have really fallen down on the job in terms of communicating to Canadians the value and the civic responsibility, in terms that the government members might understand, the civic volunteerism duty that every Canadian would have to provide a consistent supply of blood from volunteer donors across the country. That system of instruction and education needs to come from our civic education system, our education system.

I might say to the government caucus and particularly the Education minister that perhaps one segment of our curriculum review might focus, rather, instead of on changing the historical record of indigenous populations in this country with respect to residential schools and the story of indigenous people in this country – we might actually focus on something like a real, significant, and continuing unit of education on the value of volunteer blood donations and the responsibility, as volunteerism and civic duty, to provide as Canadians something as essential as a blood supply to ourselves so that we don't become hostage to a corporate system of collection and payment where the blood supply that we end up providing goes to Germany to a fractionation plant and is sold on the open market and does nothing – nothing – to increase the blood supply here in Canada, using the blood supply that would be, under the repeal of this act, bought and paid for, through the system that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo wants to implement, largely from donors who are impoverished people.

But you want to ask yourself, Mr. Chair, who in fact donates blood now and what it looks like when you look at countries which rely upon donations from paid donors. I know we use the word "compensate"; I use "pay." It's a payment. It's a monetary incentive. Who responds to those monetary incentives, Mr. Chair? It is, as the Member for St. Albert very correctly pointed out, individuals who are destitute, who rely upon government dollars for their sustenance. Perhaps people such as AISH recipients in this province, I would posit, would be those who might be tempted to try to increase their income to perhaps get a little bit ahead by offering to be paid for their blood in the future if this act became law.

I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, if indeed this government would see fit, then, to make sure that that money was clawed back, just like they did with the cost-of-living allowance that we instituted as an NDP government and this government, the UCP government, took upon itself to claw back. I'm wondering if indeed a paid system of blood procurement was implemented in this province, the government would see fit to claw back any money that was paid to a government aid recipient so that they wouldn't benefit from selling their own body parts in an effort to improve their station in life. I wouldn't put it past this type of – it wouldn't surprise me if I saw that happen.

But the point is, Mr. Chair, that this is a significantly incongruent action of a government which proposes repeatedly to rely upon the individual effort and actions of citizens to recognize the need and to help each other out. Rather than doing that, there's a headlong

rush by this repeal act, Bill 204, to hand over control of our blood supply to private corporations.

It could not have been better said, Mr. Chair, than it was said to members of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, who were presented with arguments made by presenters to that committee. In the committee the members were talking about the results of what would happen if indeed this bill was passed. It said in part, from the presentations of the stakeholders, that a complete repeal of the Voluntary Blood Donations Act – I'm quoting here: Bill 204 will not in fact increase the blood or plasma supply in Alberta or even Canada. The stakeholder presentations indicated that while permitting paid plasma in Alberta, currently all of that plasma would be sent outside of Canada. Bill 204 included no provisions, measures, or strategies that would ensure that plasma would come back to help Canadians or Albertans, so the underlying intent of this legislation is certainly not something that's been accomplished by this legislation.

If indeed we are looking at this piece of legislation in retrospect a couple of years from now, perhaps from an Auditor General's report, to see if indeed they achieved the results they were setting out to achieve – we can see clearly from those who are practically begging this government not to do it, those involved in the collection of blood in this country, that it will not accomplish what it said that it purportedly will do. It won't increase the Canadian blood supply, and in fact it just simply hands over control of our critical national blood supply to corporate entities, which will then export it to international commodity profiteers.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has joined debate.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to start off by saying thank you to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. He has an office right across the hall from me, and I can say that he's very passionate about this issue. I've heard him speaking about it a few times, and I was really honoured to be able to speak with him in the private members' public bills committee as one of the members on that committee.

Sometimes the work of that committee – I mean, it's hard work. We have to look at very personal issues and very passionate issues of our colleagues, Mr. Chair, and decide on these bills going forward. I mean, we bring these bills to the Chamber, and then we debate them. I think that's just a really wonderful thing, that we have something that is so near and dear to the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, that it's come into the House today. I know his passion for helping people has stemmed from his long career in saving people's lives, quite frankly, as a firefighter and EMT, so I just want to thank the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for his passion and dedication to Albertans and to those who need help.

We went over, I think, ad nauseam in the Assembly today about how important plasma in general is to Albertans and to people who need it. We had a variety of stakeholders come and present to the committee a few months ago. I'm not going to lie to you, Mr. Chair. I was pretty thankful for the wonderful people at *Hansard* today because I went back and read that committee's proceedings, and I have to say that it was enlightening once again to read them again and to go over the stakeholder groups that came and presented on both sides of the issue.

4:20

One thing that I was struck by was, I guess, the proclivity for stakeholder groups that are on the receiving end, the people who

need the plasma the most, just how willing they are to receive paid plasma donations. These people are the ones who rely on it the most, as I've already said, Mr. Chair. You know, that's tens of thousands of Canadians that rely on these plasma therapies and products to live. Every health care system in the country relies on a safe and secure supply of blood and blood products, so why not try to have that kind of a supply in Alberta? I think that this bill is a very good way to go back to that. By repealing the 2017 legislation that was ideological and served no one, we can see that this is an ability for us to reopen that conversation and to allow for more innovative ways to collect plasma.

Now, there has been conversation in the House today that, you know, this is profit driven – I think I even heard the words “big pharma,” which I didn't think I'd hear anywhere but some weird, like, Netflix documentary, but here we are – and people begging the government not to do this. Well, Mr. Chair, I don't see anyone begging the government not to do this. In fact, the only people begging the government not to do this are not big pharma but big unions.

The big unions are the ones that fund things like BloodWatch. BloodWatch is an organization that the NDP used to come and testify at the committee just a few months ago. The member who represents BloodWatch, the founder of BloodWatch, did a tour with her book, talking about, you know, the importance of safe supply, which we can all agree with. We need a safe blood supply, but what she negated to tell people was who was funding that tour. That was the Ontario public-sector union as well as the nurses' union in New Brunswick. They actually came to Alberta as well with Friends of Medicare and I believe it was CUPE. I could be corrected on that, but I do believe it was CUPE. When we start talking about, “Is this ethical? Is this really a good thing?” we have to ask ourselves: well, who's behind these campaigns, Mr. Chair? It would appear that once again, as is usual, this side of the House: we're siding with regular Albertans and not large groups who stand to gain from protecting these little niche categories such as things like BloodWatch.

Now, I am not going to say that groups like BloodWatch don't serve an important role. Of course they do. We should have all conversations in this House. We should be willing to talk about these issues thoroughly, but we do need to acknowledge just how important this issue is, and medi-scare tactics that the NDP use repeatedly – we hear them in the House every day – are not going to get people the vital products that they need.

We're going to have a conversation in this House that's based on data, that's based on facts and based on the results that these people need, and that's why I'm fully in support of Bill 204 and the Member for Fort McMurray-Buffalo, my great colleague, who is doing this. I mean, there are many issues that he could have chosen, and this is something that he has chosen because it's an issue that's close to his heart, and he's seen first-hand how important it is. Thank you once again to that member.

I also want to go back to this idea. You know, I asked an ethicist, Dr. Peter Jaworski, who I know is watching this debate right now, so shout-out to him. He's a very intelligent man who took the time to reach out to me as a member of the committee to talk to me about these issues and what's really important to him. He has released a variety of information on this. If members opposite who are scoffing at the remarks that I have would like to see the data, it's readily available. He has it totally explored as to how the big unions are funding this medi-scare tactic here in this debate today in Bill 204.

I would just say that if we want to continue to have this conversation, we should, but the comments made by the members opposite are misleading. They do not provide any value, Mr. Chair, and all they do is scare regular Albertans into thinking that this is somehow

going to disrupt the system. If anything, this will provide more options.

One thing that Bill 204 does not do, Mr. Chair, is specify what compensation would look like. We've heard members talk about, you know, these big pharma, scary guys setting up outside of homeless shelters or whatever have you. That concerned me as well because I heard that there was a donation clinic outside of a homeless shelter. That's why I asked in committee – and it's available on *Hansard*, actually, if the members choose to read that, but I won't hold them to it. It's available in *Hansard* that, you know, we all agree that this needs to be done ethically. That's why we consult people like, you know, ethicists who have PhDs to that effect. They are saying: what is more unethical, not to have a supply for the people who need it? I would think that that's a horrible thing in this world, where there is the opportunity to supply that blood at the highest standards, with superior safety standards, with superior health standards and to be able to have that for the people who need it.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I would just hope that the members opposite could take the opportunity to support Albertans who are living with conditions that would require them to use plasma, support the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo as he goes on to pass this piece of legislation, which is very important to him, and ultimately get on the side of normal working people and average people who just want to be able to help their neighbours and their friends. At the end of the day, having more options means more ability for us to collect plasma and these products, such as immunoglobulin and stuff, to be able to save more lives.

Mr. Chair, I would just like to, once again, thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and thank you for the opportunity to allow me to speak to this today. I would just encourage the NDP to do a little bit of research on this, see who's really funding their medi-scare campaign in this regard, and perhaps denounce that today while they could be supporting the vulnerable people who need these life-saving products.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? I recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today to lend my support to Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. The honourable and tireless work of my colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, who, by the way, is a paramedic professional, understands the needs for these things, has worked hard on this, and it's culminated in this critical piece of legislation.

I think we can all recall seeing an advertisement from Canadian Blood Services expressing the need for donations. The typical commercial reminds us that leukemia patients need up to eight units per week. Not many of us realize that eight units are enough to completely replace the human body's blood supply, and since you can only give blood every 56 days, there are a lot of other people needed in between your visit to sustain that particular individual.

While many volunteers literally give life to others through this measure, our supply of plasma is still utterly insufficient to keep up with the demand. The expert panel on protecting immunoglobulins for Canadians discovered that every jurisdiction in the world that meets their plasma needs offers reimbursement of some kind for donations, paid donations if you want.

The previous provincial government assured this House that the measure they passed in 2017 would, and I quote, ensure Albertans have access to the plasma they need. Well, as someone pointed out in this House, Canadian Blood Services collects less than 15 per

cent of the plasma needed to treat immune-deficient Canadians' needs. And here's the thing: they've had 20 years to figure out how to do this, 20 years to figure out a platform and a program and how to make it work, and they still don't have it figured out. It stands to reason that proponents of that misguided legislation were in fact just wrong. I trust they didn't really intend to limit the supply to 15 per cent of Canadians who actually need it.

We need to do something different. When something doesn't work, it's time to take another look at it. Alberta and the world are highly dependent upon the American plasma supply. For us, for Canadians that means a foreign supply over of which we have very little control; 74 per cent of the immunoglobulin and plasma-derived products around the globe are sourced from the United States, most of the rest of it from a few other countries. We literally buy it from the U.S. while maintaining some – I don't know – imagined moral higher ground that refuses to pay Canadians. We'll pay Americans for it so that we can somehow keep our moral higher ground and not pay – well, just not pay Canadians. We're happy to pay somebody else, foreign people.

4:30

Since compensated donations account for the majority of the amount of Canada's necessary supply, we pay our neighbours to the south for their plasma instead. You know what? I think if we were to be truthful and consistent and even halfway honest with ourselves, we either quit paying the Americans and create a crisis or we be sensible and pay Canadians. There is no other logic. Why do we pretend to take only donated blood, which is the high moral ground, and covertly buy 85 per cent of it from foreigners? That's a logic that completely escapes me. We have no control over it. We have no ability to inspect the facilities or set quality standards for what happens in a foreign country. We're happy to pay them and take their word for it that everything is good whereas we could have facilities here in Alberta, we could inspect them, we could have quality controls in place, and oh, by the way, we could actually let some Albertans benefit from some of that rather than benefit foreigners.

Now, I get it. Any organization that relies on volunteers can tell you that finding people to help is a constant struggle. Canadian Blood Services is no different. I guess I give them credit for it, but the reality is that patients who actually need it – the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization recently pointed out that Canadian Blood Services has spent 20 years culminating their donor base, and they've only gotten to 15 per cent of the actual need. Something else has to be done. Members of this advocacy group do not have another 20 years to wait for an adequate supply of plasma, especially when the supply shortages are actually not that uncommon.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how vulnerable we are to supply shortages. In March Canadian Blood Services informed the country that we are on the brink of a plasma shortage due to a 20 per cent drop in donations. I'd like to know where that 20 per cent drop in donations was. Since they only supply a little, tiny slice of the actual need, I suspect the drop in donations was actually in the U.S., not in Canada, because 85 per cent of our supply actually comes from outside the country. Let's be honest about the messaging here. Where was the drop in donations happening?

It's more about risks from the U.S. supply than it is about Canadians. They correctly said that we actually need plasma more than we need toilet paper. I don't think a better analogy exists or a better reason why we should actually be producing it here in Alberta from our own people, for our own people, in a context and in an environment where we can control it and, quite frankly, where we can get some jobs out of it as well instead of keeping the high moral

ground and letting all the jobs happen in the U.S. Why would we do that? Compensation can range actually from all kinds of different things. Incentives like time off work, covering travel costs, tax incentives: there are lots of different models out there internationally to look at.

Don't claim that there's a health and safety issue involved here. As I've already said, we can't inspect facilities in a foreign country. The donors in the U.S. or Europe are no healthier than Canadian donors. In fact, I suspect the Canadian donors are probably healthier. We need to have something that we can inspect and control in our own country. Patient groups have advocated for this measure. They've waited long enough, in my opinion. I want to thank them for their bravery and their resilience in championing this cause, and I truly wish to voice my support for this vital legislation, Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act, and invite everybody in this House to vote for it.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

Any other member wishing to speak to Bill 204? I recognize the Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to provide some comments on Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. I will begin my comments by indicating that this piece of legislation is not, in fact, supported by Canadian Blood Services, who have been, in fact, since the Krever inquiry and the tainted blood scandal of the 1980s, entrusted with a mandate from the federal government to ensure the security and safety of Canadian blood supply in a massive overhaul of Canada's blood collection system. In the wake of so much, there was death and suffering and an extreme amount of – there was a crisis, quite frankly, for thousands of people across this country as a result of a number of different factors. There's no question about that. But in the main it was inadequate oversight over the Canadian blood supply.

In the wake of the Krever inquiry – it was several years long, and it cost, I think, \$14 million at the time, which was a lot of money. It was a big deal. It was some of the first headlines that I remember seeing as a kid, finding it quite unfathomable that such a thing would have been allowed to happen in this country. Organizations like BloodWatch were set up as nonprofit advocacy organizations, and Canadian Blood Services was empowered through an act of Parliament. As in many different aspects of patient care and so on, we have had a number of different advocacy organizations then join the fray such as the Canadian Hemophilia Society being one, who also provided deputations to the private members' committee and with Canadian Blood Services provided a number of different arguments against this piece of legislation for members to consider.

Now, I welcome the opportunity to speak to private members' business, just as an aside, Mr. Chair, as a process. I think it is good when private members can bring forward issues that are important to them or to their constituents as private members outside of the usual Executive Council process. I find it unfortunate that we now rise to discuss only matters coming from government caucus private members, and we have yet to discuss matters coming from the Official Opposition caucus. The fact of the matter is that we are elected as individuals first and caucus members second, and every private member has a right to bring their business to the floor of this Legislature.

In this piece of legislation, however, structured as it is, it appears to be a use of private members' business for actual government policy-making and a priority of Executive Council that perhaps they did not want to bring forward as government business and so are using, then, the guise of private members' time to do that, giving

cabinet full regulation-making authority over this matter as the only real item of business in the legislation.

Mr. Yao: Point of order.

The Acting Chair: Point of order noted.
Go ahead, member.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Yao: Mr. Chair, 23(h), (i), (j). The member is making false allegations that this Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is a puppet of some sort of our government, of our elected officials, our cabinet ministers. I was in no way directed in any way, shape, or form to do this private member's bill, and the member should also note that despite her comments, this is private members' bill time. This is the time to speak on such bills, and this bill is mine. I take full ownership of this bill, I take full criticism of this bill, and I take full credit for this bill to all those people that need these vital medications that are currently coming from the United States with the hopes that these things will be developed here in Alberta.

Thank you so much.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

I recognize the Deputy Opposition House Leader. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Sabir: I think my colleague was describing the process, how it's important that private members' bills should be part of this Legislature, how we are elected as MLAs first and then part of caucus, then part of government. She was appreciating that opportunity, how it's important that we bring these forward. Well, the government changed their process so that only government-side bills are coming through. But whatever she said, I don't think it was a point of order. It's just a matter of debate. As such, it's not a point of order.

The Acting Chair: I am prepared to rule. Thank you, sir.

I will agree that I don't see a point of order here. We've had some very robust discussion going back and forth. I see this as a matter of debate, and I consider this matter closed.

Go ahead, Member.

4:40

Debate Continued

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now we find ourselves in a situation where we have a piece of legislation that purports to increase security of supply for Canadians and for Albertans specifically. Now, we find in other jurisdictions where such initiatives have been undertaken, specifically in Saskatoon and in Moncton, that the supply of plasma has not been even appreciably increased, even moderately increased as a result of the introduction of paid plasma, and certainly there has yet to be any evidence that this particular course of action to solve this particular public policy problem will be ameliorated by the course of action that is recommended in this bill. That's one of the biggest reasons why it ought to be significantly amended or reconsidered.

Now, I do want to pause quickly here and go to something that I heard previously in debate and ensure that we are making the appropriate deputations to the public about the value of convalescent plasma. Convalescent plasma, yes, was the subject of much enthusiasm with respect to a way to a therapy for COVID-19, and I heard another member make reference to this as there was a clinical trial that was proceeding in India. However, that first randomized control trial: the member did not make reference to the

fact that it has found no benefit over usual care in 464 COVID-19 adult patients, and those findings were published in the respected medical journal *BMJ*. It was an open-label, phase 2 PLACID trial, putting that matter likely to rest given that researchers need to focus on more, in the short term, therapies that are showing more promise. So I want to make sure that we are clear with Albertans on the promise of convalescent plasma and what the actual evidence and medical research is saying right now.

I think it's notable that the Canadian Blood Services has in fact taken a position that this bill ought not proceed, and it is very rare for Canadian Blood Services to take such a specific and, quite frankly, quite well-developed but also loud and such a specific advocacy position on a matter of public policy being as they are a public agency of sort. But they have variously called this type of legislation, moving forward with the kind of paid plasma experiments that we have seen in other jurisdictions, reckless. They have said that it would "put the security of our supply chain at risk." As organizations that represent patients that need plasma drugs to live, we are hopeful that the [government] will uphold the Voluntary Blood Donations Act."

Now, I think it's important to state for the record, too, that the existing legislation that this private member's business wants to repeal and replace with a simple cabinet regulation-making authority behind closed doors, that the public will hear about after the fact – it is not illegal to compensate donors in Alberta under the current law. It is illegal for private companies to pay donors to sell their plasma and turn over the profits by selling our blood as a commodity. That is the piece that is at issue here, Mr. Chair, and it is important to have clarity on what is and is not the status quo right now and then what the remedy is.

Now, I agree with my hon. colleagues that we ought to ensure that we have security and safety of supply for blood plasma products. The issue is how we get there. It is from there that my position with the government member substantially departs, Mr. Chair, because we have not seen in our context, in the Canadian context, an increase in supply or security of supply for Alberta, and then what we do see is a specific plan from Canadian Blood Services to increase our Alberta and, I'm going to assume, our Canadian supply of plasma by increasing the number of plasma donation, I guess it would be called, clinics or centres. In fact, there is one scheduled to be opening in Lethbridge in December. I have just learned of this because Canadian Blood Services reached out to me to speak to me about this bill. They're an organization that I respect a great deal given the kind of integrity that they restored to the Canadian blood supply and to public health and public safety over the last couple of decades.

Is their job done yet in terms of ensuring adequacy in the safety and security of the supply of plasma products? No, it is not, but that is not a reason for this Chamber to get in the way of the realization of that goal, that laudable goal, that I am sure we all share, which is the safety and security of the supply of plasma products for all Canadians and the assurance that Canadians who need those products will have them. That is not a reason to divert resources towards various other types of plasma collection, the introduction of blood brokers, and other types of activities that have not, in fact, always in other jurisdictions upheld the highest standards of the public interest, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 204? The Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am just rising quickly. I've already spoken in committee, but I know that I get to speak

again, which is really fun, so I'm just going to give it a little go again here.

I wonder if the members opposite have read the legislation. This bill repeals the 2017 legislation, so what it does is that it says: yes, you can. The 2017 legislation very specifically said that only Canadian Blood Services would be allowed to compensate someone if they were to provide plasma or blood products. Now, this bill provides the opportunity for more people to get in on that and for more organizations to come and fill the market, fill the need that we have in this province, in this country for plasma donations. What we've already reiterated I couldn't even count how many times today, this afternoon, is that we have a real problem with supply, Mr. Chair. We are actually paying for blood and blood products from other jurisdictions, so when we're doing that, what we're saying is that Albertans are less worthy of that compensation.

As defined in the bill by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo – I'm not going to say his name because that wouldn't be correct; sorry about that – this legislation doesn't say what this compensation is going to be like. This could be time off in lieu, which I think the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka alluded to. This could be a tax credit. This could be compensation for driving to the clinic, especially for some of us who live in areas where, you know, we probably won't have access to one of these types of clinics. I mean, it's great that Canadian Blood Services is setting one up in Lethbridge, but I don't live in Lethbridge; I live in Medicine Hat. One option could be that a clinic could set up in Calgary, and if I travel to Calgary to donate plasma, I could do that myself, and I could be compensated for my time and my mileage or whatever else, whatever that organization sees fit.

The implication that somehow by allowing more players into this and allowing more opportunities, we are going to some kind of a scandalous scenario is patently false. Just because you have more players in the game doesn't mean that the health standards that exist in this country aren't going to continue to exist. There would still be rigorous testing. There would still be rigorous checking on these products to ensure that they are safe for Canadian patients. The point is that we would have more people who are able to donate, thus increasing the capacity of our system and increasing the possibility that there would be actually more than one clinic in southern Alberta that can do this.

For me, I know that, personally, I donate my blood as often as I can. In fact, I just donated blood with the Brooks RCMP and some others. I believe it was a few months ago, I guess about six or eight weeks ago, because I got another phone call saying that it's time to donate again, which I will happily do, Mr. Chair.

I donated blood with caucus, actually, in our very first session of the Legislature. As a new MLA I travelled with the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and, I believe, actually, maybe the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and a couple of others of us. We travelled in between the morning sitting and question period, during lunch, and we popped our arms out and had a race to see who could donate the fastest. It was not only a really great opportunity to get to know my colleagues and to get out of the Legislature and see people; it was a great opportunity to be able to give back to people who need it through being able to donate those important products. Of course, that wasn't plasma, Mr. Chair – that was just blood – but, hey, whatever works.

4:50

I want to be very clear. Nobody on our side of the House is – this is not a slight against Canadian Blood Services. We respect the important work that they do, we acknowledge that they occupy a very important space in our health system, and we acknowledge that what they're doing is very important work. I have a family member

who works in a lab, and, you know, she works with Canadian Blood Services. She does extremely important work, and because of people like her, I know that it's really important for me to give blood when I can.

Once again, we're talking about ethics, Mr. Chair. I would implore the members opposite to consider how ethical it is to not have that supply available for Albertans but pay somebody else in another jurisdiction to supply that when you have no control over the process, you have no control over the testing standards, and you have no control over what's going on in other jurisdictions. At least, if we were doing it in Alberta, we could make sure it's done properly.

Now, the NDP legislation, that was brought in in 2017, as we've spoken of before, limited the ability to collect plasma and pay for it only to Canadian Blood Services, effectively making a tiny little blood monopoly. That is concerning in that these opportunities could be spread out. We could invite medical research to Alberta as an opportunity. We could have this as an opportunity for more supply that we critically need. Mr. Chair, I would just say that we have a real opportunity here to be forward thinking and to ensure that we have this for the next generation and for generations going forward and for the people who need it right now, to ensure that we have this safe supply and this critical supply of blood products.

The only difference between the arguments over there and the arguments over here is that we acknowledge that it's not just one organization that can make that happen. We are acknowledging that there are innovators and there are smart, well-intentioned, and hard-working people who want to come to Alberta and make this a reality and set up more clinics and help us increase that supply whereas the members opposite are only concerned about their union friends, who will be donating to groups like BloodWatch and bankrolling these organizations and bankrolling the fear and smear medi-scare tactics that have got us here in the first place.

Rather than scaring patients, I would implore the members opposite to look at the facts. Once again, follow the money, look where this is coming from, and step up to the plate with a real argument as to why it is better for Albertans to be left out when we could be inviting them into this process, compensating them for their time and their donations in whatever way that makes sense, and increase that critical supply so that we have it for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Today I rise in support of Bill 204, Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. I'd like to thank my colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for bringing forward such an important piece of legislation impacting the plasma supply, with which I know he is intimately familiar in his professional background. He's a seasoned professional as an EMT, a paramedic, a firefighter. This is a member who has faced some of the challenges and seen so many of those occasions where these products are required for life-saving gestures and actions, and I wanted to thank him for his service to Albertans in that respect. Because of that, I respect very much the effort and the energy he has put into bringing this bill forward to this Assembly for consideration and, hopefully, passage.

It is the responsibility of government to ensure the safety and well-being of our citizens. That's what we are in here for, to make sure that they have the safety and well-being and, of course, that they thrive in their opportunities in their constituencies. This bill

will ensure that we can do that and hold the responsibility for doing so here in this country and not be beholden across borders and to supplies from other places. Having been in this current pandemic situation, we understand that sometimes the source of supplies is extremely important to us, as we found out early on with PPE and masks and different things, which we are now producing here in this province and taking responsibility and control over what we're doing . . .

The Acting Chair: Members, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(6) the committee will now rise and report progress on Bill 204.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 204.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the report, does the Chamber concur with the report as read? All in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Extended Producer Liability

510. Mr. Turton moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine the feasibility of implementing measures such as extended producer liability that balance the environmental and economic needs of Albertans.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak today, under Motions Other than Government Motions, to Motion 510. It's my indication that an amendment will be coming after my initial speech just to change the word "liability" and make it "responsibility." But for today I'm very excited, obviously, to talk about this important and often overlooked issue about extended producer responsibility, or EPR.

Waste management and recycling is not the most exciting area of policy, but it is an important idea for how our communities operate and how families interact with our environment. We may not always see the waste that we generate, but the effects are still there. Our approach to the waste management regulatory system has a strong impact on our municipalities and the taxes our communities levy.

As a former long-term city councillor in Spruce Grove and a long-term environmental steward I saw first-hand the short- and long-term negative effects of sending recyclable items to the landfills. I also saw the large cost of municipal recycling programs and the extra municipal taxes on residents required to fund these programs.

For years municipalities and organizations such as the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association have advocated to the province to find a long-term solution, and extended producer responsibility, or EPR, is that solution. EPR is an environmental and economic policy approach in which the producer is responsible for the end-of-life management of the product or packaging it produces. EPR

can take many forms, but the most common approach deals with residential packaging and paper products.

These are the products that we buy at our local supermarkets and malls. EPR would create a regulatory structure that allows private producer strategies or a producer responsibility organization in which producers would be responsible for arranging the collection, transportation, and recycling of their end-of-life products. If this motion is passed, our government can begin to study this approach and tailor it to give our communities, municipalities, and private businesses the best outcome possible.

The benefits of this policy approach can be found right across Canada. The three largest provinces in Canada – British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec – have already adopted the EPR policy approach. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick have also adopted EPR. We are the only province in western Canada that has not adopted EPR, and because most large producers price their products nationally or regionally, Albertan consumers end up paying twice for the cost of recycling these products: first, at the point of sale and, secondly, through our municipal taxes required to receive these recycling services. By aligning with most of the country on this issue, we can reduce the cost to consumers and allow the private recycling industry to prosper.

Eunomia Research & Consulting was recently contracted to write a study on the feasibility and impacts of EPR here in Alberta. This study was contracted by the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary, the AUMA, and the Canadian Stewardship Services Alliance. This study concluded that EPR would increase recycling services to 18 per cent more households and that the cost per tonne of recycling packaging and paper products would fall from \$543 currently to \$526 in the future.

5:00

By transferring the operational and financial responsibilities of paper and packaging products from municipalities to producers, municipal spending across Alberta would be reduced by up to \$105 million, allowing municipal governments to spend more on other important initiatives or to reduce municipal taxes. Also, it is estimated that an additional 71,900 tonnes of CO₂ emissions would be avoided by the additional 21,000 tonnes of product recycled each year, which is the equivalent of taking 15,000 cars off the road annually. With 220 new jobs and an additional \$16 million added to Alberta's economy, our private recycling industry would expand.

Across Canada and the world corporations are looking at the full life cycle of the products they produce and how to minimize the impact that these products have at their end of life. This increases the efficiencies of production, reduces the amount of waste in landfills, and elevates the impact of municipal costs to residents.

What I like most about EPR is that it is a flexible approach that can accommodate different needs and interests within our province. For example, small businesses have been exempted from paying into a system throughout Canada, and the definitions for which products are included can also differ. By studying EPR, we can find the approach best suited for Alberta and ensure that all stakeholders in our province have a voice.

On this motion, I've received letters of support from Cleanfarms, Alberta recycling, the Canadian Stewardship Services Alliance, the Chemical Industry Association of Canada, and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association regarding this very important motion, and just like them, I'm excited about the possibilities and benefits that this motion could bring to our municipalities, our economy, and environment. Motion 510 doesn't just affect Spruce Grove-Stony Plain but every provincial riding in the province, and I urge all members to support this important motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Other members? The Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is so wonderful to be back in the Chamber. I know that for some of us, who are travelling great distances to be here, it can be difficult to be away from family and friends in our constituencies – you know, me in particular, my wife and my kids – but I know the work we do here is so very important. I would certainly love to bring them up here with me so they could be here, but my oldest daughter is in school, and there's nowhere I'd rather have her in school than in Cardston under the great tutelage of Mrs. Sykes and the Westwind school division, run by a great administration. But I do digress.

I am happy to speak to Motion 510 as it is very important to the recycling programs in the province. The Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain has brought forth this motion, that will extend the responsibility of recycling producers of that product.

Speaking on this motion, I would like to move an amendment. Would you like that I read the amendment out in its entirety?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, please. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Schow: The amendment on the paper here reads that I move that Motion Other than Government Motion 510 be amended by striking out “extended producer liability” and substituting “extended producer responsibility.”

Do you need all the copies as well?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

This will be amendment A1. If you would request a copy, please put up your hand. Otherwise, they'll be in the boxes at the side.

Please proceed, Member, whenever you're ready.

Mr. Schow: It would appear, Mr. Speaker, that amongst this pile of amendment copies, the original is not to be found, in which case I'm not sure where that leaves us.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Please proceed. When you locate the copy of the original, submit it.

Mr. Schow: I certainly will, Mr. Speaker. Phew. Crisis averted.

I will now continue speaking about this amendment, and you'll notice that I was so excited to sign the amendment that the date on the amendment is barely legible. I promise that my handwriting is very legible, but in this case it was very exciting.

This is because there is already a policy approach based around this wording which we want to emulate. Extended producer responsibility, also referred to as EPR, is an approach that extends producer responsibility for a product to the end of its useful life. This is not a new concept in Canada or in Alberta. We can see this happen with our bottles with the deposit fee. It is an incentive put on the producers to make sure that their products are being recycled by the consumers as they are responsible for their products.

Implementing EPR would shift the current burden for the costs of administering recycling programs from municipalities and the taxpayer to the producers and consumers of the products they choose to buy. Alberta is one of the last large provinces in the country to implement EPR on packaging and paper products. This government has committed to studying the approaches of other provinces such as Ontario. This motion is a big step in implementing EPR in our province, and I'm glad to see that municipalities are highly supportive of this change. This is because the benefits of EPR include reducing costs to municipalities, incentivizing better product design, incentivizing innovation in recycling technology, job creation, and ensuring province-wide consistency on what materials are recyclable.

Many members are probably wondering what this extended producer responsibility covers. Many products such as electronics, appliances, paint, and engine oil need to be properly managed at the end of their useful life. Under the EPR, collection of these materials for recycling is the responsibility of the producer, and collection sites are established, allowing for the recovery at end of life for products. Consumers can then return their products to these designated collection sites, after which the product would be recycled or properly disposed of.

There are many benefits of extended producer responsibility. It incentivizes producers to innovate and create easily recyclable products and packaging with less waste, which is very important. It also puts the cost away from municipalities and taxpayers, reducing their budgets toward recycling, and puts the responsibility on producers and the consumers that choose to use this product. This also lifts the burden from municipalities and taxpayers by having a system that producers will finance, design, and implement according to provincial regulations.

By having the responsibility on the producer and the consumer, they are both more aware of the costs associated with extra packaging and wastefulness in certain products. This also brings more awareness to the consumer on how much recycling products costs. If consumers have to pay more for their packaging products, they will opt to go to stores that sell products that have less packaging and therefore are being more green. Producers should also be incentivized to use less packaging and wasteful materials because they will be paying the fees up front.

Recycling is very important to reduce our waste being directed to landfills in our province. I believe that implementing a program such as this one will take the right steps to waste reduction in our province. I also thank the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain for bringing this important motion to the Assembly, and I encourage all members to vote in favour of this amendment. I think the amendment is very important. I think this motion is very important.

Some of you may or may not know this, but as I was going through graduate school, I was working as a refuse collector for the city of Edmonton for about a year. It was one of the more entertaining jobs that I've ever had, of course save for this job, and you'd be surprised what people think goes in the garbage bin instead of the recycle bin. Lots of fun stories there. A particular one that I remember: I was going down one of the back alleys in Edmonton and picking up garbage, as I usually would, and came across an exciting find, which was a deer leg, Mr. Speaker. For those of you who don't know, you cannot recycle a deer leg. I found that quite entertaining. We threw it in the garbage. What you also can't recycle is pizza boxes. Those go in the garbage as well. But you can recycle cans and electronics, and it's good to see a motion like this come forward that will incentivize us to dispose of these things properly so that they're not taking up space in the landfill.

I do encourage my government colleagues and members of the opposition to vote in favour of this motion to encourage better recycling practices. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Acting Speaker: Any other speakers wishing to speak to amendment A1? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of this amendment to change the wording to include “extended producer responsibility” rather than “liability.” I also want to join my colleague for Cardston-Siksika in sharing my experience with waste collection. In the summer of 1997 I had the privilege of being a STEP student in the MD of Badlands, which no longer exists, and one of my duties was to collect garbage from the

villages of Nacmine and Rosedale, I think they were called. Anyway, the thing about garbage collection is that the pay is low, but at least it's all-you-can-eat, so there is that benefit.

I want to say that it is incredibly urgent – I want to thank the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain for bringing forward this motion, and I want to urge in no uncertain terms the government to get on with addressing this issue of extended producer responsibility. We have a crisis with waste management that's happening in real time in this province right now, and I want to speak about the Swan Hills Treatment Centre in particular. I think that if the government adopts motions to create this extended producer responsibility, we could keep the Swan Hills Treatment Centre operational and keep the people there working. As many members may know, employees of the Swan Hills Treatment Centre got their layoff notices in September. There are 60 people who are working right now at the Swan Hills Treatment Centre who are going to be celebrating Christmas on the unemployment line because that government has decided unilaterally and with almost no notice to cut funding to the operation of the Swan Hills Treatment Centre.

This is a unique facility. As far as I know, Mr. Speaker, the Swan Hills Treatment Centre is the only facility of its kind in the entire country that is able to deal with PCB waste and other hazardous waste of that kind. I think it's, you know, important to note that the volume of waste that they are expecting to deal with is not going to decrease in the near future. PCBs are slowly being phased out, and we expect that at some point in the future – thank goodness – we won't have those things to deal with, but the other things that the Swan Hills Treatment Centre deals with are not going away.

I am speaking specifically of things like biomedical waste, paint sludge, and other household toxic wastes. Many of us here have probably participated in household toxic waste roundups that have been organized by our communities over the years, usually in the springtime: you know, take your poisonous materials that have been collected around the house to a local collection centre, and then those are taken care of. I'm sure that most Albertans don't know how those are taken care of, but I've been told that the vast majority of those substances are actually taken to the Swan Hills Treatment Centre and disposed of there.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's incredibly important that the government recognize the urgency, the importance of maintaining the Swan Hills Treatment Centre as it is. You know, at the very least, do the compassionate thing: come up with the money to keep those people working through Christmas. I couldn't imagine a worse way to end the year than being unemployed because of a decision that this government has made, with no job prospects on the horizon because, of course, this government is completely fumbling the handling of the economy, and we have the second-highest unemployment rate of any jurisdiction in the country at the moment. While we support this motion, we press the government, I think, to act immediately to save the Swan Hills Treatment Centre and down the road take the time that's needed to properly adopt this kind of extended producer responsibility.

One caution, though, that I would have for the government in pursuing policies around extended producer responsibility is making sure that the balance of the producers' costs for dealing with waste and consumers' costs of dealing with waste are properly balanced because, you know, a lot of the substances that my friend from Cardston-Siksika mentioned that would likely be targeted by this type of policy – paints, other toxic chemicals, engine oil, those kinds of things – are made by companies that are making incredible profits even in this global depression that we are finding ourselves in, right? Consumers, on the other hand, have their budgets strained to the absolute breaking point right now.

We've got 20 per cent of Albertans who aren't even sure if they're going to be able to keep their houses till the end of the year. We've got hundreds of thousands of people who are on the unemployment line, like I said, not sure how they're going to put food on the table or keep clothes on their children's backs, so it's really important, Mr. Speaker, when the government considers how to implement this kind of extended producer responsibility that they keep top of mind the need to make sure that consumers don't bear the brunt of this decision.

I appreciate the intent of the motion. The Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain said that it's not fair to taxpayers that taxpayers be asked to pay the cost of disposing this waste. I would suggest that it's also not fair from an ability-to-pay point of view to ask consumers even though they're using the products to take the lion's share of the cost, because there aren't any substitutes for a lot of these substances, right? It's not like you can replace paint with – I don't know – crayons, and you can't replace engine oil with . . .

Ms Renaud: Canola oil?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, canola oil you can, I've been told.

For a lot of these substances the reason we still use them is because there are no alternatives, so if consumers are supposed to be given a price signal to change how they consume substances, there need to be alternatives in place.

I expect that perhaps in his closing statement the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain might say that, well, yes, this is creating the correct incentive to create those alternatives, and I hope that that would be one of the long-term goals of such a producer responsibility motion, policy that's implemented, but in the short term there are no alternatives. It's incredibly unfair to ask Albertans right now to pay those costs for the disposal of those products when the people who are producing them absolutely have the capacity to pay for those costs right now.

The third thing that I want to caution the government to be mindful of when they're developing extended producer responsibility is the tremendous enforcement capacity that is needed to make sure that such a scheme works well, and there is nobody in this room and almost nobody in this province who would suggest that Alberta Environment and Parks, or whichever agency would be tasked with overseeing this kind of policy implementation, has the capacity right now to enforce such a scheme, right? We've seen massive cuts across the public service, and we expect that to develop and to enforce such a scheme would require more people doing the work of enforcement and that necessarily has to be from the public service. The provincial government in creating such a policy needs to be the one to enforce it. We don't have the enforcement capability for all of the laws that are on the books right now, so, you know, I urge the member in joining me in urging the members of Executive Council to take a look at the capacity of the government to enforce such a scheme and make sure that there are enough people in the positions to be able to do that.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I think I will just summarize the points here. Waste management is an urgent issue; the people of Swan Hills need this government to act so that they can keep their jobs now and into the future; we need to make sure the consumers aren't the ones who bear the lion's share of the costs in such a scheme because Albertans certainly can't afford to pay more for anything right now; and the government needs to step up its enforcement capacity if this scheme is to operate effectively.

5:20

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to provide my support for this amendment and certainly encourage the government members

to keep in mind the points that I have raised in debate this afternoon. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in the House in support of the amendment, which really just clarifies the language for Motion 510, which I also encourage that we support, as put forward by my colleague from Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. Taking into account the amendment, the motion states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine the feasibility of implementing measures such as extended producer responsibility that balance the environmental and economic needs of Albertans.

Now, to give credit where credit is due, Alberta does have some recycling programs already although I would say that some of these urgently need review and improvement, but at least they exist, and we need to move more in that direction. It's something that I have worked on, the idea of all of this, for the last six years, and I will continue to speak up on behalf of it.

The motion before us, though, and the amendment as it corrects it, speaks to extended producer responsibility. Most retail products and their packaging have a very limited lifespan, and then they're landfilled: a year maybe, in a disposable culture. The question is: who should pay, then, for the disposal of what's left over? Extended producer responsibility makes the producer responsible for a product and its packaging to the end of its useful life.

This motion is about implementing a change in the regulatory framework to ensure that manufacturers and producers are responsible for shouldering the cost associated with recycling their products. Similar programs have been in place for years for other products although somewhat different. For example, as has been mentioned, electronic equipment, batteries, paints, pesticides, oil, and tires all have end-of-life programs but not necessarily extended producer responsibility programs. Packaging and paper-product producers in Alberta have no responsibility whatsoever to care for their products.

We need to support the current government's natural gas strategy, for instance, for an end-to-end plastics industry. We need to include then, in that, all plastics, including diesel exhaust fluid containers, windshield washer, antifreeze containers, which were recently rejected by the Alberta Recycling Management Authority, throwing up to 100,000 kilograms of recyclable plastic every month into the landfills, according to some in the industry.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Many people in our province rarely give a lot of thought to the recycling program. They take their stuff to the curb and don't think about the costs associated with collecting, processing, reclaiming the recyclable waste that we create every day. Extended producer responsibility, or EPR, directly shifts that cost from taxpayers to the manufacturers or the producers. EPR is not a tax, as some have tried to say; it's actually a cost of doing business. Taxes create revenue for government. EPR adds nothing to general revenue. EPR encourages producers to clean up their own mess.

For instance, oil companies must reclaim well sites and even pay into an orphan well fund. Government shouldn't be left with that mess. Agricultural confined feeding operations must, by regulation and at cost, deal with manure. They can't just let it run into the waterways. Taxpayers should not have to clean up their filth. Forest companies have to clean up logging sites and reclaim roads at their cost, not dumping it onto the back of taxpayers. Why do manufacturers and retail producers get to ship packaging and product to

customers, that soon becomes garbage all over Alberta, and then walk away from it, especially when most of the product actually comes from outside of Alberta? It isn't even from here.

EPR moves recycling from a tax-supported burden to a cost-of-business effort. Paper and packaging producers would now be responsible and expected to pay for recycling their waste products, freeing up local governments to focus their efforts on other priorities in their constituencies. Municipal governments, both rural and urban, have long been highly supportive of some kind of unified provincial approach to recycling so that it would free up their revenue streams, and extended producer responsibility will significantly reduce costs for municipal jurisdictions, resulting in better services to local citizens.

EPR drives industry to design more suitable products and innovative recycling technology, creating jobs in new fields. Extending the liability to producers will also ensure that there is province-wide consistency in what materials can be and should be recycled. Each municipality doesn't have to seek out their own little plan and markets for these products; instead, producers can seek to reclaim their paper and packaging directly for future use. For instance, Lacombe Regional Waste Services Commission recently had to solicit donations. Now, listen to this. They had to solicit donations from a petrochemicals company to recycle mattresses, one of the largest landfill problems. Why isn't the mattress industry paying for that instead of a petrochemical company donating to it?

Alberta recycles the most paper products of any province on a per capita basis, but it's all paid for by taxes, not the producers. With 80 per cent of the nation already shifting responsibility to paper producers and plastics, our province should continue to explore this economically efficient form of reclamation. All western provinces except Alberta already use extended producer responsibility. We are very late to the game here. What happened to the Alberta leadership? With municipal governments having the responsibility for these programs, this results in high costs for each jurisdiction, especially in more rural areas like mine, Lacombe and Ponoka.

Local blue-bin or blue-bag programs directly affect how local governments assess property tax for each constituent. Right now recycling collection services cost Albertans up to \$105 million a year in taxes for municipalities to pay for the cost of it. These savings could be passed on to residents directly or re-invested in critical services. In fact, blue-bag programs are mostly a bait-and-switch effort. The material still ends up, for the large part, in the landfill. The same truck picks it up on a separate route that it picks up the garbage and puts it in the landfill. Consequently, Lacombe city recently had the sense to totally cancel the fraud. They cancelled the blue-bin program altogether because it just ends up in the landfill anyways, so let's call it landfill.

Many people think EPR results in an increased cost to consumers, where the reality is that that cost is actually negligible. According to EcoCompass, some of the most expensive products to produce in Ontario are drink boxes at a price of 20 cents per container, but, you know, it costs the producers in that province approximately .14 cents to recycle every small juice box. So if the manufacturer actually even doubled the cost and made money on it and passed it on to consumers, to see an increase of \$1 a year on your grocery bill, parents would need to buy 700 juice boxes. Considering that most Canadians currently benefit from EPR, the price of products is actually not likely to increase much if at all. In fact, because most provinces already have some form of responsibility placed on manufacturers and the manufacturers have built it into their costs nation-wide, the truth is that we Albertans are paying more than others already because we pay for it in the purchase and in the taxes to the municipality. We're paying for it twice, the way it is now.

Since our cities and towns foot the cost of these products, at least the recycling of them, many areas have to scale back on which items they will collect. Lacombe just quit altogether. These jurisdictions face the additional burden of finding a market for the packaging they collect, for instance, mattresses. If they can't find those enterprises who are willing and able to purchase the waste, it will just end up in the landfill, further contributing to already growing concern. EPR will expand markets for producers who seek to reclaim their products, lower the overall manufacturing cost, and repurpose those products for future uses.

Besides keeping my constituents' hard-earned money in their pockets, there are some genuine environmental benefits as well to expanding producer responsibility. The reality is that EPR in Alberta could reduce 72,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually, and for those tracking, that's about 15,000 cars a year off the road. EPR also incentivizes packaging and paper-product producers to research and implement more environmentally friendly materials for the things we buy every day. Every business, especially in this challenging climate, is always looking for cost efficiencies. If an innovative way to reclaim these products can be found, Albertans have the ingenuity and the spirit to find it, and they will do it. Quite frankly, I trust businesses to find those efficiencies.

Dissuaders of EPR may point out that small and medium producers in Alberta might see adverse effects from a program of this nature, but I argue: no, not at all. The truth is that all foreign competitors who sell into Alberta must also pay their share of EPR, and if local producers sell outside of Alberta, they don't pay the EPR on that product that goes out of the province, another perfect reason why our government should extensively study this and the impacts that it would have in Alberta. If the government wants to cut costs and balance budgets, then we should give recycling costs back to the producers, where they belong. Why is government cleaning up private messes?

With all that, I would really like to just voice my support for both the amendment and the motion, since they clearly go together, and encourage all members of this Legislature to do the same. Our government can make significant steps toward a more sustainable economic future in all of our ridings, mine included.

Thank you.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A1.

Seeing none, I'm prepared for the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Speaker: Moving back to the motion, I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Motion 510, I believe, proposed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. I appreciate the fact that he has brought this matter before this House. I imagine that he was one of the municipal councillors who wrote me a letter when I was the minister responsible for a number of the delegated authorities, including the Alberta Recycling Management Authority at the time, urging the government to undertake a process of bringing in extended producer responsibility. I agreed with him then, as I do now, that the province ought to move forward with such a framework.

It is a framework that takes time, as the hon. member will know well. Alberta does have some aspects of its recycling management that are distinct from both B.C. and Ontario, which are the other two large economies that have EPR in place. We need to make sure that we are working productively, I think, with the Alberta Recycling

Management Authority and the other delegated authorities to make sure that we are not burdening very rural municipalities too much as we bring this in, that it works well with the type of existing system that we have, and that it works well with all types of municipalities. While all municipalities have responsibility sort of in the logistics of waste collection and management, what they don't share are resources or even types of waste profile. Some will have more commercial and industrial waste, others more agricultural plastics, and so on.

Now, the extended producer responsibility is, in fact, in place in a few different products in Alberta. Of course, we did bring in a pilot for agricultural plastics in late '18, I believe, and that is moving forward with Cleanfarms in partnership, and it's good to see the new government move forward with that as well. Now the trick is going to be ensuring that the program is expanded beyond the existing tires, paint, motor oil, and large electronics to some of the smaller electronics, Mr. Speaker, because this is, in fact, where we see a number of things piling up and we don't in fact have a market created for those electronics products. They cannot just be, you know, rolled into the general refuse of a municipal landfill. They do have to be disassembled and treated properly because they pose a risk to the water table and so on.

Now, what ends up happening in other places? For example, let's just follow – I don't know – one of my old hair dryers or a flatiron, right? When my dad was around, he used to say, "Well, you're not throwing that out," and he would fix it and fix it and fix it until it finally would give up the ghost. Back in my early 20s a hundred bucks for a flatiron was a lot of money, too, but, you know, eventually we'd have to retire the poor thing.

So where does it go? Well, it goes into a small electronics heap at your municipal landfill. I was at home for the previous couple of weeks because one of my kids had an outbreak at one of their schools, so we actually did it, the old take all of this stuff that's been piling up in a Rubbermaid tub in the basement that needs to go to a specific place at the dump, and we did that trip as one of our little, you know, adventures in a time when we couldn't be around other people and breathing on them. Our light bulbs, especially those awful compact fluorescents, the twirly ones, yeah, those ones that just pile up – right? – and the batteries and all kinds of stuff: you need to make sure that you get it back there.

So my kid asked me: "Well, what happens to this stuff? You know, there are piles of it." I said: "Well, my child, we didn't quite move small electronics EPR over the line in terms of the regulatory responsibility. There are some things your mother got done and some things she didn't, and this one is an object lesson in not being able to do everything in four years."

But the drumbeat of government moves on, Mr. Speaker, and I am glad to see that in this case it is moving on. I hope that the right framework moves forward in good co-operation with ARMA because they do have good representation from municipalities of various kinds, companies that would benefit from that EPR system, the creating of those markets, and, of course, some of the manufacturers and producers.

What happens when you have EPR is that there's a small fee affixed to the hair dryer or the flatiron in question, and then what ARMA or others do is that they ensure that they are contracting folks to take away that stuff or that the cities themselves can find a company that is doing something with tires or paint or motor oil, as it is right now, and some of the large electronics and that could do something, a second life, for, you know, the tiny little parts that make up a hair dryer or a flatiron or whatever the case may be.

When the hon. member talks about the kinds of jobs and the secondary markets, those in fact do exist and are an area where Alberta innovation and especially light manufacturing and so on

can be put to good work. We should take that opportunity, and I'm glad to see that the hon. member recognizes it, as I do. That's the one piece that I know really irks municipalities, the piles of small electronics and nowhere to put them and the great cost. If we don't pay it as a consumer, then the municipality has to bear that cost for making sure that those, you know, little motors and so on and all the other metals get disposed of properly.

Now, here's the thing, though. We are already paying that small fee. You know, we pay these fees because the other large economies have extended producer responsibilities, so it's just built into the price of whatever you're going to pay for your flatiron at Winners or a stop into Chatters or whatever the case may be to pick one up. The fact is that the retailer is just keeping that fee, right? We're paying it regardless whereas that dollar of the \$89 or whatever it would cost you for that new small electronic would go through the Alberta Recycling Management Authority or some other way to configure extended producer responsibility, and then most of that fee would go towards finding someone to come take it away, take it apart, do something with it.

So Albertans are already paying these fees, and a number of the large manufacturers and retailers will tell you that that already exists. This is why, you know, very large companies like Unilever and others have said that EPR is the right way, that it needs to be extended in Alberta. They have made representations to municipalities, to the Recycling Council of Alberta, to many of the large retailers and the Canadian manufacturers in this space, and certainly to me when I was the environment minister.

You know, if you're paying it anyway – the fact is that the member is right. We are paying it when we put down our money to buy a hair dryer at Shoppers Drug Mart, and then we're paying it again because it is a draw on our municipal tax base to find a way to get rid of the stuff. Municipalities should be able to rely on an EPR system. If we did not, we would also have piles of tires and paint and used motor oil in those landfills, but we don't because we have an EPR system on those of some variety.

5:40

The other place we see this, Mr. Speaker, is in packaging and paper. What an EPR will do, then, for the manufacturers is less so relieve municipalities of the cost or burden of the recycling, although that is of concern, I think, and finding markets for this stuff, but it also then has a push on the manufacturers to reduce that packaging and paper at source. You know, if their competitors are doing it, if there's a fee on it and their competitors don't have to pay that fee because they're packaging differently, then their product will be more attractive to the consumers. That is the idea here as well. There's that additional argument here, and that can over time lead to changes in the types of materials that manufacturers use. If there's one type of material that is subject to EPR fees but there is another type of material that they could substitute that is not, then they might be able to achieve some comparative advantage. You don't find that across the board, but there are some products where you find that to be the case.

That is why I support this, and I look forward to further government action on the file.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity. It certainly is a red-letter day in the Legislature when I stand up to agree with almost absolutely everything that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka had to say. Please mark your calendars, and I'll

buy you coffee afterwards. I really do enjoy being able to speak to these issues that have support on both sides of the House. It's a good use of the Legislature's time for us to find things that we can move on with wide support. I thank all the people that have spoken to this issue up until this moment because it really addresses some of the things that I think Albertans are concerned about and has some very specific benefits for communities in Alberta, that certainly can use support in this very difficult time in our economy.

On the larger principle of things first, I think it is very important for us to acknowledge that the intent of this type of legislation is the pricing of externalities and is something that we don't do very well yet in society, and that is that people create a product, they sell that product, and they benefit from the sale of that product, but there are often things that are created in that process that are not accounted for in the manufacturing or in the retail process. As such, any of the importance or aspects of that product that remain after that financial exchange occurs tend to fall on society at large, which ultimately means government and government costs.

As a result, I think it's very important for us to realize that there are implications for things that we do, and that's true in business, as it is in any other profession. When we have those implications, it really is requisite upon us here in government to say: "Let's not ignore them any longer. Let's take responsibility for what these implications are, and let's begin to design a society that actually reflects that we understand what the implications are and that we're prepared to address those kinds of implications."

I think it's quite important that we find ourselves here having this conversation about externalities, and the fact that we see both sides of the House talking about this, I think, bodes well for the future, when we can have further conversations about pricing externalities and taking responsibility as a society to ensure that people just can't do whatever they want and ignore the implications and make everybody else responsible for them. I think that having this conversation now, at this time, will lead us to adhering to a larger global principle, which we can then apply in other circumstances, and I certainly will address those circumstances as they arise in the House.

There are also some very particular positive outcomes to this particular example of pricing externalities that I think are really worth mentioning. Having spent, you know, a significant amount of my life in a small community west of Edmonton, at least part of each year, in fact, in the riding of the member who has presented this legislation, the Spruce Grove-Stony Plain area, I'm quite aware of some of the difficulties that small communities have in dealing with waste products in their communities. I happen to have a place – my family does – next to the mayor of a small summer village west of Edmonton, and we've often had these kinds of conversations. Like many other small municipalities, every year our small summer village has what they call a big-bin event – I think these are fairly common around Alberta – where they encourage people to bring products to a central location and put them into various bins so that they get them out of the community, so they can clean up the community, so that they can prevent communities from accumulating waste and so on.

Now, if we actually had an EPR as is being proposed in this particular motion, then I think it would be really helpful for these small communities to be able to say: we would like to be able to have access to some of the EPR funds so that we can ensure that these products come forward come into these bins and that we can afford to pay for these bins to be there and to ensure that these products get to the right people so that they can be recycled. If they are not recycled or if they're not reused or not broken down, whichever process is appropriate for each of these individual products, then these small municipalities have a responsibility to

take these products and provide a dump site for them to be put into, which is a major problem in some small municipalities right now.

Finding new dump sites is very difficult. I know that when I was up in the Conklin area, they were trying to establish a new dump site, and I thought that unfortunately the municipality was making a big mistake in putting a dump site too close to a Métis community. As a result, there was lots of community conflict, but the municipality was trying to resolve a problem. Unfortunately, I didn't agree with the manner in which they were trying to resolve the problem. This kind of motion may help them to reduce the need for a new dump site and therefore reduce these kinds of community conflicts.

So I support the idea that we help these small towns and small municipalities to take advantage of large government-run programs that would allow them to reduce waste and therefore reduce costs, and ultimately, hopefully, that means taxes in small communities. We know right now that small communities are really in a very difficult place with regard to taxation given that most of them are losing substantial portions of their income through the elimination of linear taxation and, of course, the increased costs that are being imposed on them by this government with regard to the RCMP. You know, given the fact that they are losing so many of their resources, it's really important that we find a way to support these small municipalities. We don't want to be in a position where hundreds of small municipalities in the province of Alberta have to essentially or effectively shut themselves down because of the constraints being put on them by other decisions by the UCP government, so I'm very happy to be here supporting a position where we are asking people to take responsibility.

In this case we're asking corporations to take responsibility for the product that they create and for all the implications of those products, which means not only the product itself but the packaging of the product. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and I completely agree that this is problematic. In fact, as he was quite rightly mentioning, a significant number, probably the vast majority, of those products actually do not even derive originally from Alberta. That means we are actually taking responsibility for the waste of produced products from other regions throughout Canada and, in fact, throughout the world, not something that we want to do.

We want to be a jurisdiction that takes responsibility for itself and asks other jurisdictions to take responsibility for themselves, and in this way we'd be able to do that. We would be able to say that a producer, upon producing some packaging, should look at what happens to that packaging ultimately and should move that packaging into a system that will remove this from the waste stream and protect our environment. I'm very happy to be supporting a motion which I think is very environmentally sensible and would like to see them do that.

5:50

The other advantage, of course, is that it also encourages producers to take a look at their packaging. If they're going to be charged a little bit, if there's going to be a price signal involved in the packaging itself that makes the cost of their product go up a few cents to their consumer, the vast majority of producers are responsible and sensitive to price signals and will say: is there a way that we can actually reduce the packaging and make it simple to recycle? I know, for example, you know, I get products as simple as a Kleenex box at home, and it has cardboard on the outside, plastic on the inside. If I don't separate them at home, they're garbage.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

That actually was some pretty good timing because we have now spent 55 minutes debating this motion. Under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain to close debate on Motion 510.

Mr. Turton: Awesome. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to everyone for all the comments that obviously spoke very favourably about this motion. I started making some notes about giving thanks to many of the councillors and mayors and stakeholders that have reached out to me over the last couple of months with their support for this, very much an important motion. You know, approximately nine years ago, I remember, I was in Calgary at a AUMA conference when this amazing concept called EPR came up. Like most Albertans, I didn't know what that actually meant but, over many years serving on waste minimization committees, successive AUMA conferences, got to know more and more about how important this motion is for Albertans and for taxpayers, municipalities right across the province.

I want to just really quickly highlight about an event that happened last week that kind of put, I believe, the cherry on the top of this discussion, at least in my own mind. Mr. Speaker, I was in the amazing riding of Camrose. Thank you very much to the Member for Camrose for inviting me out to her riding. I urge everyone here to visit. We were in an amazing metropolis called Bashaw. I don't know if many people here know where Bashaw is located, fantastic little town. We were at one of the most state-of-the-art recycling facilities in western Canada. What this recycling facility did is that they were taking ag plastic, which I will admit, coming from an urban riding, I don't know a lot about. This recycling facility was taking ag plastic from all over, you know, Alberta and Saskatchewan, but the interesting thing is mostly from Saskatchewan and Manitoba because they already have EPR programs. There was no incentive for farmers to want to recycle ag plastic after they're used here in the province of Alberta, so trucks were coming in weekly all the way from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, bringing the ag plastic where it could be recycled, where it could be processed, cleaned, and then actually shipped to international destinations such as China for reuse in some other product. It was a true example of rural economic diversification.

That's what EPR can do. It can create the incentive for feedstock, for Albertans to be able to have the ability to dispose of their materials and recycle in an environmentally sustainable manner, and I think that's important. It created jobs in rural areas, it saves the environment, and it's an amazing boon to municipalities who are no longer on the hook for these types of recycling activities.

Anyways, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all the members that spoke out today.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 as amended carried]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank all members of the House for what I would consider to be a very productive evening. With that, subject to your consent, I would move that we adjourn this Assembly until 7:30 tonight.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	2707
Memorial Tribute	
Hon. Nicholas William Taylor, November 17, 1927, to October 3, 2020	2707
Introduction of Visitors	2707
Introduction of Guests	2707
Members' Statements	
COVID-19 Response	2707
Early Learning and Child Care	2708
Driver's Licence Road Tests	2708
COVID-19 Cases in Lethbridge	2708
Diwali	2708
Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding	2709
Strategic Aviation Advisory Council	2709
Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped	2717
Vauxhall Academy of Baseball	2717
Oral Question Period	
Health Care Worker Strike	2709, 2711
Education Funding for Students with Special Needs	2710, 2716
Cenovus Energy Acquisition of Husky Energy	2710
Chinook Regional Hospital Front-line Workers	2712
Health Care Professional Recruitment and Retention	2713
Technology Industry Development	2713
Support for Seniors	2714
Child Care Funding	2714
Skills for Jobs Provincial Agenda	2715
Automobile Insurance Premiums	2715
School Re-entry Plan and Education Funding	2717
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 205 Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act	2718
Tabling Returns and Reports	2718
Orders of the Day	2720
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 204 Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act	2720
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Extended Producer Liability	2733

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