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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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Monday evening, October 26, 2020

Day 57

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, October 26, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 35

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

[Adjourned debate October 21: Mr. Loewen]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has four minutes remaining should he choose to use them so.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to join in the debate today? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has caught my eye.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in second reading of Bill 35, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020. As we know, it has been a hot topic of debate in this Legislature, but more importantly it has been a hot topic of debate across this province. The question that most Albertans are asking themselves is: how do we recover from the year that we've had? How do we recover from a pandemic that has affected almost every Albertan in one way or another, whether it be their health, their job, their family, their future in this province? Maybe it's their work. Maybe they're a health care worker who's working the front lines and serving all Albertans. We know that all Albertans right now . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Hon. members, if you'd like to have private conversations, I encourage you to do so in those lounges. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is the only one with the call.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we know that the pandemic has hit Albertans very hard in many different ways, whether it be their health or their economic situation, their job prospects, their future in this province. It has also been hit hard, of course, by the catastrophic drop in oil prices that we've all been facing. The number one responsibility of the government is to serve the people of this province and to give hope and to develop a path forward, particularly in times of crisis.

What's been more remarkable to me, Mr. Speaker, watching, as I have, as an MLA but also as a parent, as an Albertan and watching our government, is their failure to learn any lessons from the experiences that we've all gone through in the last eight months. They have continued to pursue every single flawed – and particularly flawed in light of the pandemic and economic recession we're in – economic policy that they were pursuing before. But we are in a different world, and many of us live that every day, and many Albertans live that every day, yet this government has refused to demonstrate that they're able to show any amount of reflection, any amount of responsiveness to the situation around them. They don't seem to be capable of evaluating the evidence and the research that's been provided about what has actually happened to Albertans during this pandemic.

We see that in their approach in many ways, most of which is obvious, and it must be said because of the day that we're in right now. We're seeing that they've chosen to continue their attack on health care workers in the middle of a health pandemic, in the

middle of a crisis where we've relied upon our health care workers, whether they be behind the scenes or on the front lines. Whatever work they're doing, they're contributing to our health care system, yet this government has pursued a policy of attacking our health care workers during a pandemic.

They've also continued to pursue economic policies that were flawed to begin with, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. What Bill 35 was about is actually accelerating failed economic policy that existed before the pandemic. This government, despite the fact that Alberta was already one of the lowest tax jurisdictions in North America . . . [interjections] Under the NDP, as a matter of fact, we were one of the lowest tax jurisdictions in Alberta and proudly so. We had low payroll taxes, no consumption tax. We had all of that, but this government thought: we really need to lower the corporate tax rate even further because that's going to somehow stimulate economic growth.

Well, let's see. How did that work out for them, Mr. Speaker? In the first almost a year of their role as government in this province they lost 50,000 jobs. We saw major oil companies take their giveaway, their nice gift from the government of Alberta in the form of tax cuts, hundreds of millions of dollars, \$4.7 billion over the span of this government's life. They've taken all those dollars, and they haven't created jobs. In fact, they've taken that money and they put it into their shareholders' pockets. They've taken jobs — they've actually cut jobs in Alberta — and they said: "You know what? We're going to go to other jurisdictions to invest."

Tax cuts are not what the problem is. That's not what the problem is right now in Alberta. The problem is that investors are looking at a government that has their head in the sand, that is living in a different era, living in another time, and is doing none of the work that's required to actually attract companies to want to be here. Oil companies, investors are all saying: we want to see that the government is taking, for example, carbon emissions seriously. This government launched an attack on anybody who dares mention environmental concerns. They critique them; they belittle them. They give the very big message that they're not concerned about the economic or the environmental future of our province even though that's what every other jurisdiction, that's what every major company, that's what banks, what investment companies are all saying they need to see. But not this government. No. They'd like to pursue the same failed strategies they were before.

That's what we're seeing here again, Mr. Speaker. I can't tell you how not surprised but quite baffled I was by how this government refuses to ever actually see the writing on the wall. They took an economic policy, cutting corporate taxes for the most profitable corporations in our province, and said: "You know what? We're going to cut it further. We're going to cut it further faster. It wasn't working before, so let's speed up the rate at which we're going to give away the revenue," which we so dearly need in this province to pay for the services. In a pandemic, for example, you would think that would highlight the need for a strong public health care system, but, no, the government chose instead to say, "We're going to take those millions of dollars and give it away faster," so we have fewer dollars to support our public services at a time when Albertans need it the most.

And not just our public health care services but our education system: cutting the education system, cutting supports to children with disabilities, cutting child care. Mr. Speaker, all of the services that during the pandemic we've seen over and over working Albertans and Albertans who are now currently out of work and thinking about training for new work need the most, all those things: the government said that this is exactly the time that we believe we should cut those things further. Why? Because we're pursuing at a greater rate than earlier the failed economic policy that we started with. It doesn't matter that it wasn't working in that first year. Let's

just do more of it faster. It's remarkable, to me, that this government is doubling down on a failed strategy at a time when we need leadership, when we need compassion, when we need a government that's actually evaluating the evidence and the facts and making decisions based on that.

I'm not surprised. I mean, really, so far today we've seen that this government will not at any time look at the evidence and research about what's actually happening in this province. They're just going to continue to pursue their failed ideological strategy. That's what we see again, Mr. Speaker, with Bill 35. We see them doubling down on their failed economic strategy. Unfortunately, that's not just bad public policy-making although it certainly is; it's also incredibly damaging and harmful to Albertans.

When we have listened to the Premier defend his decision to accelerate the corporate tax cut, he's constantly referred to a handful of, let's just say, experienced economists who have been around for many years beating the drum of the same economic policies over and over again for decades and really not, again, reflecting on the fact that we have a very different economic situation than we have had in the past. Those economists all sort of look the same. They all come from the same sort of line of thinking. They form the predominant inner circle of the Premier's economic recovery panel. It's not surprising that they produce the same results because it's probably the results that the Premier was looking for to begin with.

If the Premier, who seems to, as he stood up in question period last week, values the input of economists, there are a number of economists that I think he should be listening to. One of the things that's been most remarkable during this pandemic is that it has highlighted that this is a different economic situation than we've faced before in the past. In the past, when we've had economic recession – we've had them in this province, of course; we've been on the oil and gas roller coaster for many decades in this province – we've all sort of seen the typical strategies. When the oil prices go down, we know that what happens is that governments then invest in infrastructure and building projects. It puts predominantly the men, who have lost a number of the jobs in the oil downturn, back to work by building public infrastructure. That's been the strategy. It's a pretty typical strategy.

What we know is that this pandemic and the economic recession we're facing in 2020 are different, Mr. Speaker. At least, we know that because the evidence says that. The government: I don't know if they've taken a look at the evidence. They're not paying any attention to that information. That evidence shows that it's actually women who have been hit hardest in this pandemic. This is just based on fact. I know it's not the government's favourite thing, facts, but it is based on fact. We know that women have been hit hardest by the pandemic. We know that the sectors of our economy that have been hit hardest are those that actually employ the most women. It's been the retail sector, food services, accommodation, caregiving, all those sectors that employ mostly women. Those women are the ones who, often in lower paying jobs, have lost most of their work. They've also reduced the number of hours.

7:40

Then we've seen, of course, that with the shutdown of the child care sector, complete closure for a couple of months, the school closure for three months, the slow reopening of child care, and then the reopening of the school system in September amidst a lack of support for safe school reopening, that has led to a lot of parents either not being able to find child care, not being able to afford child care, or not feeling safe about sending their kids back to school.

Again, all of that is in a context that has been created by this government. This government crippled the child care sector even

before the pandemic hit. They cut significant quality standards. They cut critical operating grants. They had indicated and are now following through on the end of the \$25-per-day program, which is about affordable child care, at a time when Alberta working parents need affordable and accessible child care more than ever.

So the child care sector is in shambles. It's operating at about 50 per cent capacity right now, Mr. Speaker. But, more importantly, for parents who've lost work or lost hours of work – and let's be clear. It's mostly women who have stayed home to take care of children without access to child care. Those women can't afford to send their kids back to child care. They can't afford to go back to work. They can't afford to increase their hours. They can't afford to go train for new work. And if they're not feeling safe about sending their kids back to school, maybe because they are not confident in this government's safe school reopening plan because they invested no dollars in actually ensuring that there was physical distancing in classrooms, or if they have a health condition in their family, they are going to opt to keep their kids home, and guess who's staying home with them? It's women.

Economic recovery is not going to happen unless we find a way and utilize strategies to get women back to work. Now, I know that's not a very comfortable place for this government to live in. I know that when I asked the Minister of Finance, when he provided his fiscal update, about the gender-based analysis plus that they are required to do – the government is required to do this analysis when they introduce new policy. It's up on their website. I imagine that any day now it'll be taken down because, really, it seems to be a wasted tool for this government. But the point of the gender-based analysis is to actually look at how policy measures that are being taken impact not just women but also individuals who are racialized, who may be minorities, to see whether or not the policies that are being introduced are actually going to (a) address the problem they're meant to address and (b) have negative, potentially unintended consequences for women and for people of colour and racialized communities, persons with disabilities.

That's the point of the analysis, and it could not be more necessary than it is with this pandemic. Again, Mr. Speaker, the research shows that it was these groups of Albertans, these groups of Canadians who were hit hardest by the pandemic, but the Minister of Finance indicated that they didn't do that analysis, or at least they failed to produce it. They said that they do really care about women; they're just not going to put anything in their economic recovery plan to actually address women. Fourteen billion dollars in that economic recovery plan, and none of it is directed at the problem that this pandemic has created. None of it is targeted at the economic strategies that would actually improve the lives of those Albertans who were hit the hardest by the pandemic.

Instead, we see platitudes about, "Oh, yeah, we care about child care" even while, Mr. Speaker, we know that this government is holding back 85 per cent of their existing child care budget. Now, we're not even talking about new dollars. We're talking about dollars that currently exist every month in their child care budget. The current government has spent 15 per cent of that. They're hanging onto the rest. Nobody knows why. Perhaps they need it to fund their war room. That money should be going to support the child care sector at a time when it needs it the most, at a time when child care operators are looking at their COVID expenses, their reduced capacity, their limited enrolment, their costs increasing, going up because they've lost a number of grants and have to raise fees. At a time when we need child care operators to stay open and at a time when we need to make sure that more Albertans can get back to work by having access to affordable child care, this government has chosen to sit on the funding that they have available to them to invest in child care.

Instead, they've turned to the federal government and said: "Yeah. Sure. We'll take your money. We'll even clap ourselves on the backs and pretend that it's kind of coming from us." But it's not, and Albertans know that. What we need is a long-term economic strategy that's actually grounded in evidence and facts. If that's the case, they can turn to a number of their – some economists, by the way, Mr. Speaker, are actually traditionally conservative economists, economists that you wouldn't normally see talking about child care. They're talking about it now, yet this government is still not listening.

One economist who I know – he and I have spirited debates back and forth on social media, Mr. Speaker – is Ken Boessenkool. He was an economic adviser to Stephen Harper for a number of years, but he has been absolutely adamant that the key to economic recovery is child care. Armine Yalnizyan from the Atkinson Foundation: she coined the term, which many economists are now using, that this is a 'shession,' not a recession, because the effect has been hardest on women, and that what we need is a 'sherecovery,' not a recovery. We need a recovery that focuses on women. She's another esteemed economist that's talking about how child care and early childhood education need to be at the forefront of economic recovery.

Dr. Lindsay Tedds from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, Dr. Tammy Schirle, Dr. Jennifer Robson: all of these are economists who have been at the forefront, since the pandemic has hit, saying the economic strategy that we need to make sure that we can get Albertans and Canadians back to work needs to focus on affordable, accessible, and quality child care. But this government is not doing that. What we see with Bill 35 is once again this government doubling down on a failed economic strategy and refusing to lift their head out of the sand and plan for a future for all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to lie to you. I thought I was speaking to the main bill, but I will use 29(2)(a) anyway because I wasn't paying attention, and I'm sorry for that. I just want to respond to some of the comments by the member opposite, which I believe are well intentioned, because, I mean, who doesn't want women included in the economy? We know that women, like, make up half of our province and therefore half of our workforce. They are strong, they're resilient, and they have shown us through this pandemic and every day that they do it all. I know that we all have different opinions on what the best way to get there is, but I truly do believe that we are all well intentioned, and nobody here wishes bad things upon Albertans or wishes for Albertans to not succeed.

But when I hear comments like we've heard on Bill 35 or at large and before, it's almost like the opposition is cheering for Albertans to fail so that they can come along and claim victory. Mr. Speaker, I find this disheartening, and I also find it appalling. I don't understand why this is the only opposition in Canada which has no desire to work with the government to support working families and working people.

I had a meeting with child care providers in Medicine Hat on behalf of the Minister of Children's Services, and we spoke to several child care providers who spoke against certain restrictions upon their businesses such as cohort sizes, recognizing different symptoms, and talked about freeing up restrictions when it comes to child care facilities so that they could be more profitable and serve more families. Mr. Speaker, you know, the women across this

province and the people in the child care industry are innovative. When the Minister of Children's Services came down, they spoke to her about all these concerns. I can say that she's been extremely responsive, hosted several town halls, met with thousands of child care providers across this province, and has done an excellent job in making sure that peoples' voices are heard.

I would also like to note that the member opposite was speaking about these precarious jobs and minimum wage jobs that many women are working in this province. That's a fact. There are a lot of women working in lower wage positions such as in the hospitality industry and others. What I find ironic is that the member opposite is suggesting that our recovery plan, the Alberta recovery plan, does not take into consideration these women when her own leader was on record the other day asking for restaurants to close at 10 o'clock. These are the same women that would be not benefiting because they wouldn't be allowed to work because the members opposite have a bad feeling.

Our government knows that we need to keep our economy open. That's why we have a bold and targeted economic action plan. That's why the Minister of Finance has presented this. You know, I'm not an economist myself, and I don't think there's anybody with a PhD in economics in this Chamber, but it does really blow my mind that members opposite would discredit the work of the economists such as Dr. Jack Mintz and Bev Dahlby and others. I'm not sure if they would rather us use Friedrich Engels. But it's concerning to me that this politics of fear and division comes even into this, when we're speaking about a gendered response to the pandemic.

I've said this before, and I'll say it again, and I'm sure I'm going to receive flak for it – I'm sure somebody is tweeting about it now, because why wouldn't they be? – but it amazes me, Mr. Speaker, that we think we have to do these special things to make women more a part of things or we have to pull up a special pink chair for them or we have to, you know, almost placate women. We don't. We need a strong working economy that works for everyone in Alberta, that includes Alberta women, and one of the ways we're going to do that is by consulting the women themselves. We need to make sure that we're having a conversation with Alberta men and women to figure out what is the best solution for them. That solution is not destroying our hospitality industry by closing early. It's not by imposing further restrictions. It's not by increasing lockdowns. It's not by decreasing their capacity. It's by allowing them to stay open and find innovative solutions to ensure that our economy can keep going.

7:50

Mr. Speaker, I would just like a time check on 29(2)(a) if you don't mind. Ten seconds.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to stand and support Bill 35, the tax statutes amendment act, and I would implore the opposition to do the same.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for 29(2)(a).

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. member for Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

The Speaker: It's all yours.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak tonight to Bill 35, tax statutes amendment act, an act, I believe, that is positioning Alberta to compete long term. I find it appalling that the opposition continues to go down a narrative of giving tax money away when we're reducing the tax rate. Reducing a tax rate is essentially taking less out of the pockets of businesses that we allow to operate within this province, the businesses that create the jobs, create the wealth to pay for all of the services that we expect as Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic our government offered a sign of hope to Albertans with the Alberta recovery plan, a plan that outlined our goals for our province and the necessary steps needed to get to recovery. As part of our plan, we promised to both accelerate the job-creation tax cut and introduce the innovation employment grant. Now, with Bill 35 our government is living up to our adage of a promise made and a promise kept. Arriving a year and a half ahead of schedule, part of the bill, the job-creation tax cut, embodies our government's hardline belief in Alberta businesses.

As we continue to recover from the economic fallout caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, our government is more committed than ever to making Alberta the most tax-competitive province in our country and a top business destination for investment. In July of this year our government lowered Alberta's corporate tax rate from 10 per cent to 8 per cent. While a 2 per cent difference may not seem like much, this cut is 30 per cent lower than the next lowest provincial rate. At the same time, the combined federal-provincial tax is the lowest in Canada and is even proportionally lower than 44 of the 50 states, meaning Alberta is one of the most tax-competitive business jurisdictions in North America. Competition is vigorous, and we have to ensure that the businesses that are looking to invest in North America, that are looking to invest globally can see a place, in Alberta, where the government recognizes that they are important and the government is willing to offer them the opportunity to create wealth, create jobs, and provide the backbone, the foundation that our economy needs at this time.

While our tax cut will benefit all industries, it is important to note the benefit to nonresource sectors as the act provides a greater incentive for non resource-based firms to invest and grow. This investment and growth will in turn help diversify our economy and help advance Alberta businesses for generations to come.

With so many challenges facing our businesses right now, one way our government is assisting Albertans is by cultivating a business climate that can create jobs, encourage investment, and support innovation and diversification. This legislation creates more opportunities for growth within businesses by limiting overall tax costs, allowing for earnings to cycle back into those businesses. Our economy is hurting right now. Albertans are hurting right now. Now is not the time for our government to spend itself out of a crisis; now is the time for our government to help our businesses grow and our economy to recover.

Alberta has seen too much investment and capital leaving our province due to the job-killing policies of the previous NDP government, a government that increased corporate taxation – yes, increased corporate taxation – and in return collected yet less. They implemented carbon taxes on everyone and on everything, increased red tape, increased the cost of electricity. The list goes on. In general, the previous NDP government increased costs significantly across all industries, driving investment out of our province.

We need strong and effective action, policies that can help reboot our economy and in return create jobs. Through the job-creation tax cut our province now has one of the most competitive tax policies in North America. This climate in turn fosters future growth of

existing businesses and industries as well as welcomes more businesses to return or even to start establishing their roots in Alberta. The re-emergence of new and returning businesses will lead to additional jobs and productivity, translating into increased revenue for our province over time. Simply put, we are investing in Alberta's long-term future, not a get-rich-quick scenario.

Mr. Speaker, the second part of Bill 35, the innovation employment grant, helps to usher in advancements and innovation in Alberta while creating jobs. The innovation employment grant encourages economic growth from the bottom up by supporting small and medium-sized businesses that invest in research and development. By investing between \$60 million to \$70 million in 2021, the grant incentivizes further growth and innovation in Alberta. I cannot stress enough how much our government believes in advancing Alberta's businesses to better compete on the world stage. Albertans know the potential of our province, and our government is staking a claim in that belief. This legislation is our pledge to Albertans that we believe in our province's capabilities, and we want to see innovation happen right here. We want an Alberta that competitively leads by example not just in our country but globally.

The innovation employment grant provides an adequate incentive to Alberta businesses to think big and try new things. As many businesses know, the extent of thought is often limited to the limits of the budget. However, through this legislation we want businesses to worry less about the restraints on their ideas and more about the larger capabilities. Bill 35's innovation employment grant will reward increased research and development spending of Alberta businesses. Again, this grant focuses on small and medium-sized firms, so even the biggest ideas will not be restricted to the extent of their company's resources.

At the same time, this grant will also support job creation as it provides more money for companies to invest less of their own capital into research and instead into increasing their workforce. In other words, the grant will free up more money for firms to employ Albertans. As these businesses continue to grow with the support of the grant, they will gradually be phased out of the innovation employment grant and into a more self-sufficient model that will then benefit from the job-creation tax cut.

It is our every intention for businesses to thrive. Therefore, it is important to continue to offer supports that meet businesses where they are at. This adaptive approach allows for less government spending over time and increased revenues as more businesses become self-sufficient. This legislation looks to assist Alberta businesses by offering a hand up, not a handout. In other words, the job-creation tax cut and the innovation employment grant give businesses the supports they need to build their success in whichever direction they choose. While they must meet the criteria to apply, our government has no interest in commanding businesses to do what we want. That is just not realistic or feasible. Instead, our government wants to reward Albertans who choose to think outside the box. This does not mean they have to reinvent the wheel. Rather, it means they may dictate what areas of their specific sector may need to improve.

As the Reverend William Boetcker once said:

You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift.

You cannot keep out of [financial] trouble by spending more than [you earn].

You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.

You cannot [help] the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer.

You cannot further the brotherhood of man by [encouraging] class hatred.

You cannot help the poor . . . by destroying the rich.

You cannot build character and courage by taking away... initiative and independence.

8:00

As Alberta businesses continue to weather the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic, our government must encourage innovation, investment, and job creation across this province. Our government understands that you cannot spend your way out of a crisis. Of course, there are always increased expenses in any emergency response, but we are ensuring responsible and effective expenses that cost less in the future. In other words, the tax statutes amendment act is an investment in our future.

This government is placing its heartfelt belief in businesses within our province by giving them the means to grow, diversify, and innovate for the betterment of our economy. By taking less, Mr. Speaker, this government is allowing the wealth created by these private-sector businesses to help them recover and to help them grow, and in turn as they grow, create jobs, jobs that so many Albertans need at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the thoughts from the member on Bill 35 and his thoughts, I guess, on some of the past developments under the time that we were in government and his thoughts on what he believes this bill will in fact do. In regard to the government's \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway he says that they are taking less to help businesses recover, to help them grow, to help them create jobs. He spoke specifically of how Albertans need jobs. I would note that so far not a single job has been created in Alberta as a result of the millions of dollars that this government has shovelled out the door as part of their corporate giveaway.

Every dollar has picked up and left this province. We have lost jobs. The companies that took millions of dollars from this government have taken jobs out of the province of Alberta. Indeed, just today in question period we were asking the Minister of Energy to provide us with the information about the latest of that, as we see both Husky and Cenovus in their merger looking to eliminate further jobs in the province of Alberta. So whatever this government's intention is with their corporate giveaway, it is not, in fact, helping any business recover in Alberta or grow in Alberta or creating a single job in Alberta. It is doing nothing to help Albertans.

Now, the minister – the member. Perhaps some day he may be a minister; I could see it happen, but at the moment he is a member. He also spoke of our government and talked about us driving investment out of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. And he spoke at length about his government's new innovation employment grant. Let me be clear. The IEG is far from innovative in any way. It is barely restoring what this government tore down, and their own Innovation Capital Working Group said as much. Indeed, they talk about how this government drove tech and innovation out of the province of Alberta, and their IEG will not even come into place until July 1 of next year. We are hoping that tech and innovation companies will hang on until then, after this government already clearly sent them a message that they were not wanted here, before this government woke up to the fact that diversification is not in fact a long-term luxury for the province of Alberta but an absolute necessity now and that tech and innovation are an essential part of that.

Indeed, their own Innovation Capital Working Group said that the elimination of the provincial portion of the SRED, which every province had, Mr. Speaker, but this government eliminated, and the Alberta investor tax credit had created a perception amongst

investors and start-ups that the technology industry is not a priority for Alberta and not a part of the economic mix for the future of the province. That is driving investment, the economy of the future, out of our province.

Now, as I've said previously, I'm glad that this government has seen some of the error in their ways and have taken some steps to repair the damage that they did, but they have no place to be, as this member just was, patting themselves on the back for introducing a tax credit, grant, that doesn't even come close to replacing what they tore away or the investment that they cut from Alberta Innovates or the chaos that they created throughout the tech and innovation industry when they stripped those with no prior notice, no consultation, and offered nothing for months afterwards.

I hope they will learn from this. I hope that they will continue to restore the advantage that they took away from the province of Alberta, that they will indeed work to make Alberta the most competitive province in Canada in tech and innovation. They've got a ways to go to get there. I will applaud them if they actually do it, but I will not stand here and listen to critique from members when they themselves have done so much damage.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for 29(2)(a). Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak the first time to Bill 35. You know, I really benefited from listening to the views of members of the government who spoke in defence of Bill 35. I pulled out Budget '18 when I was upstairs in my office, and I just want to respond to something that was said by the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock with regard to Alberta and its tax competitiveness. This is from Budget '18, on page 123, I'm reading.

Alberta continues to have an overall tax advantage compared to other provinces, with no sales tax, no health premium and no payroll tax.

Businesses and Albertans in this province would pay \$11.2 billion less than B.C. who had higher business taxes, higher personal taxes, and other charges in taxes.

This comparison includes personal and corporate income taxes, as I just mentioned, sales tax, fuel tax, carbon charges, tobacco tax, health premiums, payroll tax, liquor tax and markups, land transfer tax and other minor taxes.

So it's just incorrect, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that this province under the NDP government had uncompetitive taxes. In 2018 there was an \$11.2 billion tax advantage to the closest province, B.C., and that went all the way up to \$21.5 billion in Newfoundland. That advantage in Alberta only grew under this when we were government. It's just incorrect to suggest that we wrecked things on the tax side because we didn't. The evidence is in fiscal plan '18, '17, '16. I could go on about that, but I just wanted to correct that record.

I appreciate the fact that my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre got up to essentially correct the record around other things that we did as government. For instance, it was then a new interactive digital media tax credit worth 25 per cent of eligible labour costs, as he just clearly pointed out just a few seconds ago, that was killed under the current government. We are bringing back something in Bill 35 that is weak sauce compared to that, Mr. Speaker.

8:10

I wanted to also address something that was raised by the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat just a few minutes ago, in

response to my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, under 29(2)(a). I just want to say that I believe as legislators, we all want Alberta and Albertans to win. That's why we're here, to clearly improve this province for our children, our grandchildren, generations to come. We're elected to bring value, and hopefully members of government on the opposite side will see that we do bring value. We want Albertans to win. Brooks-Medicine Hat referenced that child care providers, women primarily, people who deliver child care, you know, were obstructed by this NDP opposition.

I can remember the things that we did that I'm most proud of, Mr. Speaker, under our budgets. When my colleague from Calgary-McCall was the Community and Social Services minister – it's kind of changed a little bit, the title – he brought forward the indexation of income support programs in this province, and he brought forward programs through the government initiatives that we were involved with that cut child poverty by 50 per cent. From 80,000 children and families in this province to 40,000 children. I can tell you that when the results came in of the impact of the programs that we put in place as a government, that was one of the proudest moments that I had as a social worker, former city councillor, or legislator in this province, to see the poverty rate in this province among children cut in half. And we did that with programs that we put in place. Yes, we needed to work on a lot of different supports, but we did that.

So when I hear the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat say that, you know, child care providers see us as obstructing their efforts, I can tell you that delivering child care to children who aren't poor is a far different thing than trying to support kids who don't have enough to eat at their homes and come to the child care centre. I think that's a win for Albertans; that shows that we're on the side of Albertans who want to have less poverty in this province. Child care providers want that for their kids. They don't want kids who are struggling to have a decent meal. They want kids coming to them prepared to learn and be cared for. That supports child care workers in this province, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat also talked about the Alberta recovery plan, and I can tell you that on this side of the House, we've been working very hard on albertasfuture.ca, our recovery plan that is getting a lot of Albertans excited about the various initiatives in different sectors that we're talking about right now.

Tonight one of my colleagues is speaking with members of the – what is it she's talking to? People in the energy industry. Geothermal? Hydrogen. Sorry; geothermal is another day, Mr. Speaker. She's talking about a hydrogen plant with those stakeholders, and that's just one of 17 different initiatives that are on albertasfuture.ca that we are engaging Albertans all across this province on. We'll have a lot more information to bring forward to the House, to bring forward to Albertans in that regard.

I just want to go back to the fiscal plan, Budget 2018 and just talk about a few more of the things that are here, that were brought forward in that plan, that, regrettably, this government saw fit to eliminate. One of those is the Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit that we extended to '21-22 under Budget 2018.

I just want to give members of the House a little bit of context about why that came about. It came about because when I was Finance minister, I would, I'm sure like the current Finance minister, go around the province and talk to chambers of commerce in various cities and towns, talk to different stakeholders in boardrooms, and repeatedly one initiative that was brought forward was an investor tax credit and a capital investment tax credit. The chamber in Calgary was very strong on that coming to fruition

during our term. They started talking to me about it in late 2015, early 2016, and we took the opportunity to listen, to work with them, and bring it in, as you can see, in 2017.

You know, the other thing that we did as a government that this new government has chosen to not do is to index personal income taxes. I know that that indexation came at a cost. In 2018 it was \$65 million, but this government has chosen not to do that. What that means is that Albertans are paying more in taxes at a time when many are struggling across this province. We know that hundreds of thousands of Albertans are out of work right now. Over 290,000 Albertans are struggling to find employment, and it is challenging as companies continue to be rocked by the pandemic that we're all in right now. That's not a good thing, to not index these personal income taxes.

You know, there are some parts of this bill that are mirroring the federal government's statutes. That occurred regularly when we were in government. We brought those tax statutes forward for debate, and they typically went through quickly. Those aren't the issues and what I'm concerned about here today.

The other things, Mr. Speaker, that I want to focus on with regard to – I think my colleague from the community of the riding of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock talked about it in terms of giving up tax base. Well, the \$4.7 billion is what I'm talking about, which was in a previous budget by this government. We know that wealthy shareholders have been the beneficiaries of that. It was spoken of as a way to stimulate the economy, give it a shot of adrenaline, give it a shot in the arm to get everything going faster in this province. Investments, job creation, job retention: all of those things were the reasons it was brought forward, but regrettably, for many reasons, that has not happened. As I said, 290,000 Albertans are out of work, so as my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre just talked about, companies have used those monies, not having to put those out in taxes, and benefited from them, but Alberta hasn't benefited from them.

We're told again from Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock that this is a long-term play, that we need to think of this as a long-term investment. Well, that's really how we thought about the Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit, things that would benefit people who brought money to the table. They could then know that the taxes they paid in the future would be less as a result of the money they put on the table.

8:20

This long-term investment has really not turned out very well, Mr. Speaker. I think anybody looking at this would agree that before the pandemic, when the \$4.7 billion tax giveaway was in place, 50,000 jobs were lost by this government. The deficit has more than doubled to \$24.2 billion, and that's the highest it's ever been in Alberta. We know that the economy has contracted in this province. When I've got fiscal plan 2018 before me and fiscal plan 2017 and '16: there was growth in this province, even with a significant drop in the price of oil, which was an international event, not one caused by the presence of an NDP government in this province but one caused by the cartels and others having a prolonged battle that affected our energy-producing companies and this province.

We saw that takes place, Mr. Speaker, but we still grew in this province. We grew in part because we leaned on infrastructure development, as everybody knows, and that counterstimulus benefited Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Now, just to clarify, we are on Standing Order 29(2)(a); is that what you're hoping to speak to?

Ms Glasgo: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am rising on 29(2)(a) right now, and I'm very thankful to be recognized. I just wanted to respond to some of the comments or, yes, the interpretations by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. You know, it's kind of a pattern of behaviour from the opposition to reinterpret and reinvent things that people say in the House just to support a narrative. It's funny to me; I don't think – and I can be corrected. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I asked some colleagues, and I didn't say that the NDP were getting in the way of child care providers. I said that they were getting in the way of Albertans because all they want to do is play politics during a pandemic instead of actually working with the government to find solutions that work for everyone.

But while we're on the topic of child care, I think it's important to note that without the proactive work by the Minister of Children's Services, we wouldn't have what we have right now. We have 97 per cent of our daycares that are actually open right now. The NDP's solution to that – [interjections] while they heckle and are jealous of the minister for her success. The NDP's solution is a rinse-and-repeat strategy of the same old tired, boring policy that didn't work. We see the NDP putting forward albertasfuture.ca with more tired policy.

Then my personal favourite is that, Mr. Speaker, the NDP: they talk about this innovative strategy. Well, 10 days before we released a hydrogen strategy. The NDP could've just said good job, but instead they had to create their own press release and do their own song and dance and parade it out there like they knew what they were talking about, but, anyway, we're back.

I don't understand why we can't just come into this House in the spirit of co-operation; we can't have a conversation like adults about the ability for us to get Albertans back on track. At the end of the day that doesn't happen by shutting down our industry. It doesn't happen by increasing more restrictions. It doesn't happen by cutting off the knees of small-business owners and cutting off at the knees providers who need help.

Mr. Speaker, I would implore, like I said before, the opposition to think deeply about how they respond in this pandemic. I think it's one thing to want to be re-elected in 2023 – I think I speak for all members when I say that it'd be nice to be re-elected in 2023 – but now this is a pandemic. This is a crisis that has not been seen since the Great Depression. We have record deficits that we have to face. The solution to that is not going to be to heckle, fearmonger, and deliberately mislead Albertans. It is concerning to me that this is what we see coming up time and time again from the members opposite.

In addition, there was \$99 million in supports for child care announced between the federal and provincial governments to continue to meet the needs of child care providers, and these providers were actually able to open early.

I know that in my personal experience, JBS Brooks was an extremely important part of our economic – there were a lot of people going to work at that time. While, yes, this was the site of a major outbreak, Alberta Health Services – which we cannot thank the minister enough for being so responsive to our community and what we needed, but the Minister of Children's Services was also extremely responsive and quick to help the people of Brooks who needed it most, especially those people who needed child care at that time, Mr. Speaker. I know there was a letter from the mayor of Brooks in which he asked the minister to help us out by opening some child care facilities earlier so that we could get women and their families back to work, and that's exactly what happened. The

minister expedited processes to make sure that these men and women could send their children so that they continue to earn a living for their family. That's what this minister is committed to do.

I can say that she brings a common-sense approach to whatever she does. Unfortunately, that is lost on the members opposite. Like I said, rinse and repeat is a great strategy for washing our hands, Mr. Speaker – and we should all be doing that because we're in a global pandemic – but not with old, tired, stale policy that quite clearly hasn't worked in the past.

I would just once again ask the opposition to recognize that this piece of legislation is extremely important, and it'll make Alberta one of the most competitive jurisdictions in North America to invest and to live, work, and raise your family. This is an important piece of legislation. It's a crucial piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I would implore the members opposite to really think long and hard about the repercussions of not supporting this.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for 29(2)(a).

I heard the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat use a statement like “deliberately mislead.” Now, I unfortunately missed the words immediately prior to that, so it's possible that she was using it in a parliamentary context. It is rarely available to say the words “deliberately mislead” and it be parliamentary, but given that I didn't hear, I'll just caution her for the use of such language in the future.

On the main bill now we are at the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore and the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to everybody who has contributed to this conversation this evening. There are a few things that I'd like to get into, and that I'd certainly like to dispel in a few minutes, but before I go into that, I would like to quote, actually, our Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. “Alberta is the strong, innovative province it is today because of visionary women.” It is in a statement that he made, interestingly enough, when we talk about women in innovation. It's called SheInnovates. It's one of the many, many organizations in this province that works specifically with women, especially in the entrepreneurial field.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you know this, but in Canada for every 100 male entrepreneurs, there are about 63 women. In Alberta that is at 84. In the tech sector we are two times the national average in this province just to give you an idea of the incredible, viable, and unbelievably competent women that work in this province, not to mention the fact that this side happens to see them as competent and amazing and viable and not victims of anything. In fact, if anything, in COVID it's women who understood and were much more able to bounce back.

I wanted to follow up that statement with some facts, Mr. Speaker. Fact: women are a vital part of Alberta's economy, and visionary female entrepreneurs and innovators have built the province that we live in today. Fact: our recovery plan is about making sure that all Albertans get back to work. Actually, one of the best facts of this is how that recovery plan has impacted women specifically. Did you know that actually more women have returned to work than men at this point? In fact, women between the ages of 25 and 55 are back to pre-COVID numbers, just to dispel the facts that are coming from the opposite side.

That is part of the recovery plan. That is part of this relaunch. That is part of the vision that comes from people who understand markets, who understand profit, and who understand getting out of the way so that businesses can actually be viable in this province.

Let me remind the opposition that they are the ones who brought in the carbon tax, which was one of the largest and most impactful things on small business in this province.

8:30

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, I've yet to hear one member of the opposition stand up against Gil McGowan, who attacked small business last week. That is attacking 51 per cent of our population, 84 out of 100 men who are entrepreneurs in this province, starting up some of the best tech companies in the country right now, in this province, largely in part due to the relaunch strategy that has come from the government, not to mention the fact that that relaunch strategy was brought forward by many, many people in this province, not only economists but businesspeople.

I'd also like to thank the Minister of Advanced Education for working on STEM projects and scholarships for women in STEM. One of the things that the opposition doesn't remember is that they didn't do any work on that when they were in government. In fact, they were so anti-oil and antiresources in this province, it wouldn't have even been able to be in a speaking point for them to talk about women in STEM and technology, because it would have been against their own ideology against oil and gas in the province, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, if you look at – in 2013 in this province, in construction alone, construction jobs for women grew by 113 per cent. Imagine with the relaunch strategy that we have right now that includes infrastructure. The opposition seems to think that none of those jobs are going to impact women at all. Well, with the opportunities to come forward – I don't know. I happen to think women are quite capable of doing pretty much anything that anybody else can do, and given the opportunity to be able to do so, I can hardly wait to see how the hard-working, resilient women of this province come forward and prove them wrong.

In fact, I've seen it over and over again. We talk about child care. Who do you think is at the helm of the child care discussion? Women. Our Minister of Children's Services has met with every association across this province to make sure and find out what is going on with those organizations, not to mention the fact that – another thing the opposition doesn't like is choice. This is choice for parents and how it is that they'd like to look at child care for their kids. Not to mention the fact that she opened child care immediately to make sure that front-line workers were able to get back to work as soon as possible.

What's really interesting, Mr. Speaker, and I think the part that I find most disturbing is that every time the government and Albertans try to move forward to open something up, that opposition is telling us we should shut it down. In fact, I think the Leader of the Opposition said "shut it down" three times in a row last week in question period: shut it down, shut it down, shut it down. So on one hand getting women back to work, who are – if we're looking at education in particular, a large part of our teachers are women. We want to get them back to work but not really. Oh, not to mention the fact that the Minister of Education has given so many wonderful choices to the people in Alberta. Not only can they send their kids to school, but there's home school, and there's also home-school. At a time when the most important thing right now is not only to get kids back to school but for their social and mental well-being as well.

If we look across the country, I'd like to give a huge shout-out to Albertans, teachers, and parents right now for their incredible work in keeping their families and their kids healthy. Congratulations. The NDP won't say that. No. They talk about the Minister of Education not being able to get the kids back to school safely when actually it's those parents, those teachers, those trustees, and those

school boards that deserve full credit for getting those kids back to school safe and sound. It's absolutely despicable to me to hear the opposition speak about the lack of ability to get kids back to school when actually they're attacking the very families that they think that they're supporting. I love the word support. I will use air quotes again, "support," because it's unbelievable to me how easily they're willing to jump in and just shut it down.

We're looking at restaurants right now. You look at restaurants and the impact on restaurants. I remember, I think it was when the opposition was in government, and they had done the \$15 minimum wage increase. Somebody from my riding in a place called the Bears Den had spoken about the impacts of that \$15 minimum wage increase on their servers and on the tips that they would be receiving and many other things. This is coming from a businessperson, so I would suggest that he's an expert. Then the former Premier decided to attack restaurants, saying that they're serving \$85 steaks and that their servers then had to go to the food bank afterwards, attacking small business literally in a province that is uplifted by its small businesses and small-business entrepreneurs. Yet not a single member of the opposition, Mr. Speaker, has spoken out against Gil McGowan. Not one.

You know, the Member for Calgary-Falconridge spoke about this last week, about how it hurts. It hurts every single one of those women that puts every dollar, risking, into her business to make sure that they can create a business in a province where the environment is there to have it happen and then have people who supposedly care stand up and say: small business doesn't matter. In fact, part of Bill 35 is talking about those small and medium businesses, about research and development, which is exactly where women are heading. That is why we are putting dollars into funding STEM scholarships.

Did you know that Muriel Cheriton was the second woman to graduate from engineering at the University of Alberta in 1968? She speaks all the time, even at that time, about the importance of STEM and how we were losing some of the best and most brilliant minds by not inspiring them to go into STEM. It's not even about the degree, Mr. Speaker. It's about an interest in innovation and technology and about really, really engaging with these young girls and women to look at other opportunities, to be able to have those wonderful, sustainable jobs that are the future of this province.

You know, it's interesting, because the opposition was talking about the lack of funding and interest into tech and innovation in this province. I remember a Bugs Bunny cartoon: it is to laugh; ha ha ha. I don't know if you remember that, but it is absolutely laughable that they would look at what we're doing and compare it to what they were planning to do, supposed dollars that were supposedly going into tech and innovation when actual dollars are going in here.

It's not even the money, Mr. Speaker. It's actually not about funding the projects. It's about creating an environment where it's successful, where it's possible. Every time somebody like Gil McGowan stands up and attacks the very people of this province straight up and justifies it, it's absolutely heart-wrenching for those people. I'm a small-business person. I put everything I had into my business. Everything. I dragged my kids. I mean, my husband and I have had – I don't know – probably seven businesses between us. Our children have grown up in all of those businesses, dragged through Costco in shopping carts and everything else to buy products and this and that, but it was a beautiful part of being an Albertan, of being able to participate in growing my business.

You know, I had my youngest in a Snugli when my husband had one of his businesses, and I'd be behind the counter talking to every single one of our customers who came in. What was interesting was that as my younger one got older and his diagnosis was coming in

with autism, we would have these discussions just across the counter about my son, and we would talk with other parents about some of the issues that they were going through. These were beautiful conversations that happened as a result of me being in my business, on the front, with a baby in my Snuggli talking about things that moms talk about across the counter. Let me tell you, I outworked every single guy who ever came in front of me – that's why that business was successful – with a baby.

As a result of that, our children now, who are 22 and 24, work in those businesses with my husband, proudly so. They know how to talk to people, know how to engage in a conversation, know how to make people feel welcome in our businesses, understand the privilege of what it's like to be in this province and be able to start a business like that.

You know, we are right now at the cusp of a change, of an opportunity where we actually could all work together. Great ideas come from both sides. There's not a need to just destroy everything that comes up. I mean, we've seen today that we're able to work together; we're able to do these things together. There are lots of great ideas out there, but this is a matter of actually being able to understand and listen to each other and understand this. Look, one of the things that you always hear about in Alberta is: if you can see it, you can be it. The can-do attitude, right? There's a whole bunch of us on this side that have owned our own businesses. All of us have heard that can-do attitude, the fact that my customers could phone me at any time of the evening, of the night to have a conversation. When I was teaching music, I had parents calling me sometimes at 11 o'clock at night because they'd left their music or whatever, whatever the reason was.

8:40

But the thing is, is that you built up relationships with these people, and you trusted each other. You know, in a small town like Chestermere or Strathmore a lot of it is small business. One thing I wanted to mention is that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was talking about tax dollars going to corporations. I don't know. Am I mistaken, do corporations not hire women? Am I mistaken in that? I thought so. I thought maybe I had missed that. I'm pretty sure that women are working for corporations and larger businesses that are going to be receiving tax cuts that are going to make a huge difference in their ability to be viable in this province.

The other thing that I thought was really interesting is that – I don't know – anybody who is a rural MLA in here: we know about the women's small businesses that pop up and are probably incredibly successful, at least in my areas, as a result of large corporations being able to hire all of the people around them: women, men, you know, all of these wonderful, wonderful – she was talking about, you know, retail and restaurant and tourism sector. You want to know how those become viable and successful? You have to have a healthy economy. And to assume that those jobs are not directed at women is ludicrous. Absolutely ludicrous.

My dad is a chemical engineer. He dragged me all over this province to every little teeny tiny town to meet draftswomen and draftsmen and people who work in the sour gas industry. I collected those little red pencils for, like, a hundred years because I loved them and he always kept them for me. They would make me hot chocolate in those really, really, really cold portables. You know, every single time I went out to one of those places, I met incredible men and women who are working in the sector. Incredible men and women who are the shoulders on which we stand on in this province.

For Gil McGowan to attack those people, those businesses that are triggered because of corporation, oil and gas, agriculture, and manufacturing – by the way, just in case you're interested and in

case you would like to change your tune on women entrepreneurs, it is Women's Entrepreneurship Day on November 19. So maybe instead of attacking the incredible women in your ridings, you can go and give them a really high five and tell them they're awesome. Viable, competent, amazing women: we are not victims. Stop your war on women.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today. I'd just like to elaborate a little bit on what the minister spoke about on creating jobs. With the help of many amazing ministers here, my ministry has been able to create many jobs, unlike what the opposition has been saying about no jobs being created. Let me just point out some of the jobs that we've created so far this year, in a time of pandemic, when it's hard to get anything done.

One of the first things we've got is the Red Crow Community College, a college down in southern Alberta. We did the groundbreaking just not that long ago, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and seventy construction jobs. There are jobs right there. That's not even counting all of the additions that are going to be put on for the many programs that other ministers have helped us supply down there, so that's awesome.

The Elizabeth Métis settlement, another amazing minister helped us out there. An indigenous housing capital program: 21 jobs, 21 new jobs right there.

The Metis Crossing. Part of what we're working on for our whole indigenous tourism operation, that's just the start of it, the Metis Crossing. Seven hundred jobs, 700 jobs, Mr. Speaker. That's just the start of it, they're just starting there. They've got an amazing view over the North Saskatchewan River that's going to create a hotel, create jobs for the local people, construction jobs, ongoing. It's just an amazing program we've got going up there.

In my department we've got what we call the aboriginal business investment fund. So far this year, 150 full-time jobs. Yeah, 150. It's amazing. We're just getting started. We're about to announce eight more programs coming up. I don't even know how many jobs that's going to create. Lots, that's how many.

And then we've got the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. We rolled out our first program, our very first program, six First Nations involved, 600 full-time jobs. Six hundred. That's going to not only help that. That doesn't even include, under the natural gas program, how many people are going to be employed providing clean natural gas, lowering the carbon footprint, creating 8 per cent of Alberta's power. What a partnership that is. Six First Nations working together, partners in prosperity with Alberta, Mr. Speaker. It's an amazing program.

We've got two indigenous companies producing personal protective equipment. I was up at one, Mr. Speaker. Here there are 30 little ladies, 30 little kokums up there sewing away, producing personal protective equipment. You see the amazing mask I'm always wearing. They're doing an amazing job there. We've got another company that we just toured in Edmonton, another 30 employees creating every sort of personal protective equipment you can imagine, and they're just getting started. These things are growing. We're creating jobs all over the place.

We were up at Fort Chip not long ago. A new school is being built for two First Nations and a Métis nation up there. I don't know how many schools we've got going in the province, hundreds, and other projects going on under that program. Infrastructure and road construction jobs: thousands of jobs being created there, Mr. Speaker.

We've got our AIOC projects. They're just starting to roll out. The first one created 600 jobs. I can't even count how many new jobs are going to be created there. It's so exciting to be involved in that, and what an opportunity. Just thank you to all of the ministers that have helped us out to get all of these projects rolling.

We've also got, like I talked about, our aboriginal business investment fund. Everything from – they're smaller projects, but they create jobs in the communities. We've got service stations going. We've got a store up at Fort Chip that we helped get going up there. At the other existing store, a litre of milk: it's the home of the \$20 litre of milk. Now they can buy it at regular prices. It helps the kids get proper food and nutrition. These are just some of the projects that we've been rolling out, Mr. Speaker. We continue to roll out these projects, and there are going to be more and more jobs created as we go.

So to say that no jobs have been created: just in my little department, look how many jobs. The other ministers are just getting started. You're going to see jobs rolling out time after time after time. This is giving hope to people in Alberta. Even my own daughter, who is an electrician – there's another woman, an electrician. When she heard about the new power project going up, she said: well, this is awesome. There's an opportunity for women like herself. There are lots of women who work in the electrical business. You know, and proud of what she does. Worked hard. Did it all on her own. I was trying to make her be a secretary or something, and she said: "Dad, I've been working with you for the last 10 years building houses. I'm going to be an electrician." She took it on all by herself, and now she's working in that field.

There are so many opportunities out there. We just have to keep not telling people there are no jobs. We've got to keep telling people there is hope. That's what people want to hear. They want to hear there's hope.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are back on the main bill. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, followed by the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 35. Just quickly touching on the last member's comments about: Albertans are needing to see hope. I agree that they need to see that. That hope would come from if this government actually took action to fulfill their campaign commitment to create jobs, to strengthen the economy. They continue to wait for that.

In my conversations with constituents, whether it's in my office, people who are dealing with the effects of the pandemic, not being able to find work, or through my personal conversations, as we call constituents on a regular basis, they are all hoping that this government at some point will take an opportunity, of which they've had several up to this point in the last year and a half, to reflect on the decisions that they've made, specifically looking at the \$4.7 billion decision that they made to give this money to the largest, most profitable corporations across our province, and reflect on that and realize that it's simply not working.

Now more than ever, in the middle of a pandemic, is an opportunity for us to take that moment. We continue to hear members in the government talk about that the opposition NDP caucus is unwilling to work on a plan with this government, well, we're simply waiting for them to bring one forward at all. We've been waiting a year and a half for that, and so have all Albertans.

8:50

You know, being in government is obviously not an easy job. It's about making important and hard choices. One of the choices that

this government and this Premier made was to fire their minister that was in charge of jobs and the economy. Now, I support the choice that the government made on that front, but unfortunately I don't support the choice that they made to replace that person with the person that they did.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

Unfortunately, here we are, a year and a half into this government's mandate, with zero jobs created, going into this pandemic with 50,000 jobs lost, and, once again, this government is doubling down on the \$4.7 billion handout, which we've heard so much about. Of course, being in opposition, we took the opportunity to request what documents this government has seen, what documents the Finance minister has seen to make such decisions to actually accelerate this program instead of stopping and changing course to something that might actually work, and unfortunately there was no strategy behind that. There were no documents to show that the decision, you know, to give \$4.7 billion to the most profitable corporations was working.

Really, what we've seen in the news even this week are more decisions made by corporations to take that money to buy back stocks, as we've heard so much about, to move their operations outside of Alberta, to amalgamate their corporations, which will inevitably lead to more layoffs across the province. Simply, their plan to create jobs is not working.

Now, while this government talks about how good a job they've done handling the economy through the pandemic, I will remind you that at the beginning of this pandemic, as the numbers were peaking in the first wave, this government gave the city of Calgary one day's notice that they would be forced to close many of their businesses in that city. I wouldn't say that that is good planning, by any means, Mr. Speaker. Frankly, it's very rich for this government to say that they've been doing such a great job and that we could learn so many lessons from them if we would just listen, because it's simply not the case.

At the same time as that was happening, with very little time for that city to come to terms with what decisions the government was making, the government was also refusing to provide things like PPE for small businesses. This was one of the main things that these small and medium-sized businesses were asking for. They were asking for direction and guidelines for how they could safely open their business, another thing that this government was silent on and really left a lot of these decisions up to those businesses. There's no doubt that in most instances those businesses were able to, because they understand a lot of the risks, but the fact is that they shouldn't necessarily have to make those decisions themselves. They should have a government that's competent enough to reflect on the important pieces of safety that need to be implemented, and unfortunately this government, once again, was silent on that front.

Now, we heard a member of the government talk about the fact that through this legislation, through the corporate handouts that we've seen from this government and now the acceleration of that, that this is a policy that's building the economy from the ground up, which is simply ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. You know, we've seen this tired strategy over and over again, this idea that if we give enough money to the largest, most profitable corporations, it will somehow trickle down to the people who need it most. It's not working. We've seen it in this case. We've seen it for decades before this. Unfortunately, you know, there was a member in the government talking about tired ideas. This is really the most tired of them all.

Now, another thing that we hear from this government, as they cut supports for seniors, as they deindex AISH for people with

disabilities in our community, as they claw back copayments for medical coverage not only for seniors but for the dependants of seniors, as they claw back PUF funding for children even before trying to enter the K to 12 system, is that it's about sustainability, Mr. Speaker. I don't see what's sustainable about getting rid of these important programs or scaling them back to a point where they're not even effective anymore. We talk about sustainability, but they're gutting these programs down to the bare minimum.

I appreciate that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud brought up the fact – I believe that it was that member – that we had reduced child poverty by 50 per cent, something that I'm very proud of. Sorry; it was actually Calgary-Buffalo, my apologies, who brought up that fact.

Those were targeted decisions, that we invested money into programs like the Alberta child benefit. We, once again, indexed AISH, raised the amount of money that people with disabilities get from income supports like that program. We created school nutrition programs. Once again, these are decisions that – the government came into power and cut those programs, cut school nutrition programs, deindexed AISH. It's unbelievable, and somehow this government doesn't think that that's their responsibility, to reduce child poverty in half, or if they do, they have a funny way of showing it, Mr. Speaker. So I would ask: how many more billions of dollars do we need to invest in giveaways to large corporations before this government sees a reduction in child poverty by half? I don't see it happening.

Now, I appreciate the minister that just rose to speak about some of the projects that this government has invested in and that have created jobs, and I appreciate that. It's important. We have always talked in the NDP caucus about the fact that government dollars, especially in times of recession and in times where corporate dollars are drying up – it's especially important that government invests those funds. I appreciate that one member on that side is actually willing to admit that the government has a role in creating jobs, because if he took it from his Finance minister, he would never admit that, or at least up to this point he has never done so.

Once again, the same minister that said diversification is a luxury not that long ago, and now, well, he's adamant that he never said that or that it was taken out of context or whatever his answer may be today. Unfortunately it's a day too late, well, many days too late, really. It would have been nice if that minister recognized the importance of diversification a year and a half ago, but here we are.

Now, once again, when we look at the number of people out of work right now, over 290,000 Albertans are out of work. This government, other than this tired, old piece of legislation that we have in front of us, talking about the acceleration of a program that hasn't worked to this date – it's all they have. Once again, the minister of economic development and trade or jobs had the opportunity over the last year and a half and absolutely failed at that job, and now we see this government and this Premier making the decision to replace that minister, but it's simply, once again, too late.

The decisions have been made to get rid of programs like the interactive digital media tax credit, the Alberta investor tax credit, the capital investment tax credit, all important programs that were consulted on across the province with the Chambers of Commerce, with local, small, medium, large-sized businesses, with tech companies that were looking at building a legacy here in our province.

But, unfortunately, when this government came in, despite their campaign promise to create jobs, they got rid of all of those programs without anything to replace them for a year and a half and left all those companies reeling, trying to figure out how they were going to fund their business, which many of them simply couldn't. Many of them said: "Why would we stay here? You're cutting

corporate taxes for the largest, most profitable corporations, but none of that is going to affect us. We need capital up front." That's what these tax credits are about. We need angel investors, something that was made very clear under our government when the previous minister of economic development went on tours to Silicon Valley with the mayors of our major cities and many other stakeholders in the business community. I simply don't understand how this government came into power, came into government and decided that those programs weren't good enough, when they had been consulted on for several years before they came into power. Unfortunately, it's par for the course with this government. If it's not their idea, well, it's not good enough. That's what we've seen.

Once again, the government members say we don't work with them. Well, first of all, it would be nice to see them show their work, because we really haven't seen it. All we've seen is them cutting jobs. When we talk about the investments that they have made, whether we're looking at child care – well, the cuts that they made in that instance, but the federal government came to save the day. Once again, in education, the federal government having to bail out this Education minister for the terrible job that that minister has done. Thankfully, in terms of what it means for the Edmonton public and Edmonton Catholic school boards, about a \$37 million injection of funds is still much lower than what should have been budgeted by this provincial minister, who is completely failing to support the next generation of workers and families in our community.

9:00

It's not just in the K to 12 system. We look at the terrible job that the Advanced Education minister has done in raising the interest rate on tuition, on raising tuition, on the chaos that the Advanced Education minister is creating across postsecondary institutions across our province, who are right now trying to find out how they're going to get rid of hundreds of staff because of the decisions of this minister with very little time for input from other stakeholders, for input from the students. Absolute chaos, Mr. Speaker, and it really is across every ministry. No one is safe from the cuts of this government. What this government likes to call sustainability is really just a disaster for everyone who's affected by it.

Now, when we talk about the decision to accelerate the \$4.7 billion failed jobs plan from this government, the move-out plan for multinational corporations outside of our province . . .

An Hon. Member: No-jobs corporate handout.

Mr. Carson: There are a lot of ways to put it, but none of them are good, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about that money to be invested – invested – or thrown away towards something, we're already the lowest costing jurisdiction across Canada, if not among the lowest. Instead of matching tax-credit programs for digital media like we see in other provinces, instead of ensuring that we're on a level playing field for growing technologies, we're seeing, unfortunately, that this government cut those programs once again. When we reflect back on the four years with the NDP in power, the projections of, you know, 2 per cent growth going into our last year, I believe, and we compare it to what we're seeing now in the shrinking of the economy that we're seeing here in Alberta, it's absolutely laughable that this government thinks that they're doing a better job than, really, anyone.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview raised a very good point. You know, I don't like to give a lot of credit to the government in Ontario, but the fact is that when we compare the two of what we have here, I am very surprised that I actually have to give it to Premier Ford. You know, in some cases he's doing a

much better job than our Premier here. I only wish that this Premier would stand up to the people who are giving him his marching orders as much as the Ontario Premier would over there because it would mean more investments in child care, and it would mean more investments in education and in PPE and important things that keep our economy going. Unfortunately, this Premier simply doesn't want to, as far as it seems, listen to anyone other than, well, large, profitable multinational corporations who are doing well, are just as well off and, unfortunately, are the last ones who need support compared to small and medium-sized businesses.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I go back up to Grande Prairie-Wapiti on the weekends, I hear one thing. It's a real recognition that times are tough, but the common sentiment is this: times are tough, but we're so glad the government isn't made up of the NDP. I hear that time and time and time again. The reason for that is that the NDP had four years to govern, and during that four-year time frame tens of billions of dollars fled this province and, with it, tens of thousands of jobs and opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I listen to the members opposite carry on. There's no recognition that this province is facing a pandemic within its borders. There's no recognition that, in fact, we're experiencing the largest contraction to the global economy since the Great Depression. There's no recognition that, in fact, our reality as a province right now is that we've dealt with the largest collapse in global energy prices in modern history. There's no recognition of that.

Here's the other cold truth. This government, Alberta's government, inherited a fiscal mess from the members opposite. During a time of declining revenues the members opposite kept pushing up spending. The members opposite brag about their record of supporting businesses. Well, Mr. Speaker, here's their record. They increased business taxes by 20 per cent, and then billions, tens of billions of dollars left this province. They introduced a carbon tax and, with it, taxed utilities on every senior across the province, taxed every business that used energy. Every mode of transportation was taxed. That's the NDP record on the economy.

Mr. Speaker, at the University of Calgary the School of Public Policy has done some excellent research on corporate tax effects on the economy. They have done some important research that demonstrates that workers bear the vast majority of tax costs. They concluded that for every dollar of CIT increase, corporate income tax increase, wages declined by 95 cents. When the members opposite, when they were in government, raised corporate taxes by 20 per cent, effectively wages in this province dropped from where they would have otherwise been. We don't hear a lot about that, but that is the truth. Those are the facts.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the innovation employment grant. This is a grant that is innovative. It is creative. It rewards incremental activity, and it dovetails with our preferred corporate income tax environment. It begins to phase out when taxable capital reaches \$10 million, the same threshold when corporations move from a small business to a general tax rate. Effectively, we have created two advantages that provide advantage to start-ups and early scale-up businesses, and as those businesses grow and flourish, they immediately benefit from our preferred business tax rate.

Mr. Speaker, we hear from the members opposite time and time again that it is only large, wealthy corporations that benefit from our job-creation tax credit. Nothing could be further from the truth. Seventy-five per cent of businesses in this province that will benefit from our preferred business tax rate file as small businesses under

CRA guidelines. We are assisting entrepreneurs in this province. We are assisting individuals who've invested all of their life savings, have worked 14 hours a day to build a business, have sacrificed. That's who we're assisting with this job-creation tax cut. That's why we are continuing with this policy that will attract investment and grow the economy.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak? I see the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise on Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020. Thanks for spotting me, Mr. Speaker. We're having such a robust debate here this evening that I've never had to jump up so much in my life, maybe, since I was in gym class, but it's a good workout for my lower body, so excellent.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? Before I get into my main comments on Bill 35, which I'm very excited to talk about, we've been having a great back and forth here on Bill 35, both the government side and opposition, and I want to go back to the comments from the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat and the back and forth with the members for Edmonton-City Centre and Calgary-Buffalo. You know, I think this is a great, harmonious point that we can make in this House, the people of Alberta's House, that we all care for Albertans, and we all want what is good for Albertans. We might disagree on the path there, but I think that was a great coming together moment for this Legislature. Now, what I will say on that point is that the NDP had four years to govern, and it was four years of economic devastation. The record is clear: tried, tested, and failed.

9:10

As the Minister of Finance spoke about earlier, Mr. Speaker, it was a record of record capital flight, job loss, and most importantly, in the province of hope, long the province of milk and honey, Albertans lost hope. It was a very, very rough period. For the NDP to continue on with their socialist economic philosophy is just, really, almost too much to stomach.

So before I get into my comments as to why I so strongly and proudly, like so many members, all members on the government side, support Bill 35 and the prosperity-generating power of tax reduction, tax relief for Albertans, including – wait for it – corporations. I said it: corporations, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, they are people, including women, as the minister of multiculturalism and the status of women rightfully pointed out. I say to my colleagues in the NDP in this House, with 87 members – and we are all privileged to be members here, for sure. I love representing my riding of Sherwood Park. I'm sure, like the other 86 people here, I think I have the best riding. Myself and the Minister of Service Alberta: I guess we sort of compete for that; we're in the same community. But I say to my opposition colleagues: "Walk away from the Leap Manifesto economics, now. Walk away from the Gil McGowan aggression against Alberta businesses, including SMEs, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the kooky Corbynista economic philosophies. It is being rejected in the western democratic world." They know it; it deeply bothers them. So that is my advice.

Now, on to why I support Bill 35, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020. Four main points I want to drive home to this House. There are some important history lessons we need to learn, factual history, not Marxist revisionist history, that we hear from the other side, but factual, empirical history. The postmodernists won't like that, but that's okay. We're going to take a look at the international relations

perspective as to why I support this bill as the Member for Sherwood Park, some local supportive stories – how about that? – in our communities. So many people in Strathcona county are excited for the acceleration of the job-creation tax cut and then the supports for small businesses that the Minister of Finance rightly pointed out, Mr. Speaker.

So, to begin, let's just say that Alberta is open for business and that this bill reinforces that, right? I've always said – and I've heard it in many corners talking to great constituents, Henry and Martha, good salt-of-the-earth Albertans . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: From Rimbey.

Mr. Walker: Oh, from Rimbey. Of course. Yes. The House leader is correct.

They say that the business of Alberta is business. It's not top-down government run from behind the scenes by Gil McGowan or big unions or whoever. That's not the Alberta story. That's not what brought us the Alberta advantage. What brought us the Alberta advantage is exactly what's found in Bill 35, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act. We want to reduce taxation, unleash the entrepreneur, allow everyone to rise from that rising tide. That's what we philosophically believe, and we have since we became a province on September 1, 1905.

So let's do a little history lesson and see how this goes over. I know I'm probably going to cite, through my macroeconomic North American analysis over the 20th century, some of the opposition's favourite political leaders, I'm sure. But here's the economic truth on reducing taxes, including – wait for it – corporations, Mr. Speaker. Holy smokes. In the history of the 20th century in North America, for example, here are economic facts. Marxists can't revise this. Four U.S. Presidents as well as Alberta Premiers have reduced, reformed taxes over the course of the 20th century, and you know what happened? According to the economic analysis, they saw government revenues and economic growth increase, just like this, just like me going up and down trying to talk to you today, trying to get you to see me. [interjection] Like a rocket – that's right – the minister of agriculture says. That's what happened; that's the empirical facts. Four U.S. Presidents, for example, presided over this: Harding; Kennedy, a Democrat; Reagan – I'm sure the opposition loves him – as well as Bush, the one they probably really like, Bush 43. They saw massive economic growth, as probably one of their favourite Premiers, Ralph Klein, saw as well. This is the economic data. We need to be based in facts, so I invite the opposition to join me in looking at facts, including the Corbynistas in the opposition.

While the former NDP government – here's what happened with them with the empirical data, Mr. Speaker. They raised taxes and saw government revenues and economic growth decline. That's the record. The empirical evidence on the record: that is crystal clear. Reducing taxation equals increased government revenues to fund important social programs that we all care dearly about, as I know the opposition does. But increasing taxes, including on corporations, leads to capital flight, job loss, and government revenue decreasing, so they can't do their big government central planning. It doesn't make sense. That's the record.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's go into the international relations perspective, even beyond North America. Now, we are an integrated North American economy, and we must compete globally for capital. This bill makes us more globally competitive to attract investment and to encourage job creators to invest here in Alberta through the acceleration of the job-creation tax cut as well as the innovation employment grant, which will help foster a very robust tech sector. We're seeing great growth in the Calgary tech

sector right now. The Alberta recovery plan is working, with over \$200 million invested in tech start-ups in Calgary. Now, our new corporate tax, at 8 per cent, is 30 per cent lower than the lowest provincial rate, and its combined federal-provincial-state rate will be lower than 44 states. That's a very important point. We're not just competing with the other Canadian provinces.

As I have said many times in this House over 18 months, I believe in Albertan exceptionalism. We are peerless among the provinces. But we have to compete with Texas and Oklahoma and others, and they are very competitive, too. That helps keep us competitive. Globally, since the end of the Cold War, some of the largest economies in Asia as well, Mr. Speaker, have realized that the market economy is the way to go to lift people up and bring them into the middle class. Hundreds of millions have followed this path. Alberta is tried, tested, and true on this path for over 115 years. We need the opposition to come onboard and, again, walk away from the kooky Leap Manifesto economics.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Let me go into some great local stories because we all should be – a major role and responsibility of parliamentarians is to be deeply connected to their ridings. I'm proud to say that I live in my riding. It's a wonderful place to live, in Sherwood Park, right on the bubble outside of Edmonton, thank goodness. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to be – there's always a rivalry between Sherwood Park and Edmonton. That's fine. We all cheer for the Oilers. I am so proud to be the Member for Sherwood Park. Here are some great local stories of people who are supporting Bill 35 and are excited for this amazing tax relief that will be provided. We thank the Minister of Finance for his leadership on this bill.

Now, Strathcona county is an entrepreneurial hub. We have over 5,000 businesses – small, medium-sized, and large corporations – that employ many Albertans. Years ago, when Edmonton turned up their nose at the refineries, we said: "Come to Sherwood Park. We will take them." And that is why, one of the key reasons, we are the most affluent region in Alberta. That's a fact. The family income is \$162,000 a year. We've made good business decisions, Mr. Speaker.

I have heard from companies, large and small, that this tax relief will encourage them to invest, to continue to grow their companies, and most importantly – I heard this, including from major economic stakeholders, large corporations in my area – one of the first things they will do with the monies that are put back in their pockets through Bill 35 is that they will retain workers. Shame on the opposition for vilifying business, for vilifying corporations. The corporate responsibility ethos is strong in Alberta. It just seems to have not been notified or passed on to the Corbynistas in the opposition.

An Hon. Member: Gil McGowan.

9:20

Mr. Walker: Gil McGowan and the like. That's right.

At the end of the day, we as Albertans, one of our founding creeds, even before the province became a province in 1905, is that the people of Alberta, including their businesses, know how to spend their money better than the government does. That is a driving principle that most Albertans believe in, and that showed up in the thumping victory of this free-enterprise government in April 2019, a historic victory.

Now, this legislation, again, will support job creators critically because to maintain prosperity, we need the private sector to be humming along. It cannot be government led. Government is here, Mr. Speaker, to set the conditions, absolutely, but, you know, hiring

economic decline while taxing businesses and making life hard through burdensome regulation was not the way to go. That's the economic record. It is one of total economic pain and little or no gain unless you were in a public-sector union or something of that matter.

Now, I want to focus in on the point for supporting small business. Mr. Speaker, how am I doing for time, if I may ask? Okay. Thanks.

Just to reiterate the great point that the Minister of Finance made, this is good. Bill 35 and the job-acceleration tax cut is good for small, medium, and large businesses. It's going to benefit over 75 – it's estimated that 75 per cent of businesses that benefit from the job-creation tax cut are small businesses. I've heard loud and clear that the beating heart of entrepreneurship in Sherwood Park is small business. It will benefit them. I feel the opposition often paints this with much too broad of a brush. Large business is okay, too, but please understand that the mom-and-pops, the Henry and Marthas, who have their whole life savings in their business, will benefit from this, too. Ninety-five per cent of Alberta businesses are small businesses.

Mr. Jason Nixon: How much?

Mr. Walker: Ninety-five per cent. Thank you, House leader.

Ninety-five per cent are small businesses, so it is support. You need to support them because they are the foundation of Alberta's economic prosperity. They comprise 25 per cent of GDP, Mr. Speaker. They employ hundreds of thousands of Albertans right across this beautiful province, from the north, the south, our two metros, and everywhere in between. One-third of private-sector employment is via small business.

Thinking my time is coming to an end, I will just wrap up again and say one more time that we have had a great, robust debate on very important policy. I was so excited to speak to Bill 35. If you want to get me really rared up and a tickle goes up my leg, we want to talk about the prosperity-generating power. I saw that face, Mr. Speaker. We want to talk about the prosperity-generating power of tax cuts, which I deeply believe in. As I've laid out through facts, this is the macroeconomic history of, for example, North America over the course of the 20th century. Corbynistas can keep their ideological blinders on, but I've laid out the truth. I know for Marxists and postmodernists that's sort of a relative term but not on this side, not on the government side.

One more time: I'm so proud to support this bill. I strongly support it, and I ask the NDP to walk away from the crazy Leap Manifesto economics.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Unfortunately for the Government House Leader, it is the opposition's turn. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall was the first on his feet.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

The Speaker: Oh, I'm more than happy to have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora have the call, but I think that's typically the Speaker who chooses.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to my colleague for ceding the floor for the opportunity to respond to this. I'm happy to wash my hands for probably the 30th time today and proudly in this place. I think that we should all be doing more of that, Mr. Speaker.

I want to acknowledge that I am responding to questions and comments with regard to the last speaker. I also want to say that it's been a long time, since at least February, well, March, I guess, since

any of us have been able to be at a basketball game, so I hope you'll give us a little room for our enthusiasm in response to the questions-and-comments portion here tonight as well as other debate opportunities we've had in this House today.

I want to start by saying one thing in terms of the Sherwood Park-Edmonton rivalry or competition, that I think was mentioned. I am very proud to be an MLA in Edmonton and part of the capital region, and I've always had the attitude, as do most of my friends and neighbours, that what's good for me is good for my neighbours and vice versa, and that includes the municipality of Sherwood Park and Strathcona county and all of the surrounding, wonderful neighbourhoods and communities in the capital region. I want to start by saying that I wish the folks of Sherwood Park well in terms of their health, in terms of their economics, and in terms of their happiness, Mr. Speaker. Let's say that first.

Second, I want to touch a little bit on some of the highlighted revisionist history from the neoliberal advocate that just spoke prior to myself. Talking about portions of the '60s, '70s, '80s, and early '90s as being evidence of policies that are being enacted in this government today, that we've already had a trial period of 18 months on – and we've seen tremendous failures on those policies that are trying to be revived by our colleagues in the UCP here in this place – I don't think exactly bodes well for your ability to talk about today's economy and today's response to recycled, old conservative ideas, neoliberal ideas from decades far past, Mr. Speaker.

To say that because something was done under George Bush's time and therefore it will work today in Alberta under the current regime – I would say: let's look at what's happening today in Alberta. Let's look at what happened when phase 1 of the \$4.7 billion corporate handout was brought in. I didn't say "no jobs" because we didn't know what was going to happen at that time. At that time, certainly, the government campaigned hard, saying that there were going to be significant jobs as a result of giving \$4.7 billion to large, profitable corporations. It's on page 144 of their first budget. They keep saying that they don't know where you could possibly get this number. We actually read the budget. When we did our estimates, it came at \$4.5 billion. That's why, when we first started talking about this plan, based on our projections, we were saying \$4.5 billion, but it changed to \$4.7 billion because the government printed it in their own budget. Page 144, 12 squared, such a nice number to be able to remember when you're in this place.

For my colleague to refer to economics of the '60s, '70s, '80s, and '90s and therefore say that because there were some successes under these policies decades ago, we will therefore see successes when in this province, driving those same policies, what do we actually see? We saw 50,000 fewer jobs in this province between the time when that policy, that old policy, was brought in and when the government decided to fast-track it – no, not even. Between when the policy was brought in and the beginning of the pandemic.

We know that what happened during the pandemic is that there were even greater job losses, Mr. Speaker. I'm not even speaking to that period of time because I think we want to look at the period of time that the government is saying that, you know, they were one hundred per cent responsible for. They say that they're not responsible for things that have happened since the pandemic. They are the government and certainly owe it to the people of Alberta to play a leadership role. I have to say that, seeing the numbers today, in terms of the COVID numbers, and continuing to hear remarks from government members around personal responsibility, I think the government needs to step up and take some responsibility, both in terms of economic policy and actual desire to create diversification, which Albertans tell us overwhelmingly that they believe in.

When I door-knock in Sherwood Park, they tell me they want diversification. Of course, they are grateful to have the industries that we do have in the capital region, including the municipality of Sherwood Park, as am I. But they want to make sure that there are other opportunities and additional industries today, tomorrow, and, of course, for future generations, Mr. Speaker, and they deserve that. They deserve to have an opportunity to be able to live in their communities and have successful economic opportunities as well.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, not under 29(2)(a).

The Speaker: This would be on the bill.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I've been looking forward to speak about the bill, Mr. Speaker. I did enjoy the comments from the acting NDP leader on this important piece of legislation. You know, a lot of the comments are around revisiting past policies. The reality is that, of course, she belonged to a socialist government, the former government of this place, which was, of course, an NDP government focused on socialist philosophies that, from my perspective and certainly your constituents' and my constituents' perspectives, certainly damaged the province significantly.

I do want to just start off by recognizing that our friends to the east, the Hon. Scott Moe, the Premier of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, just soundly defeated the same socialist party inside Saskatchewan: 47 seats. We know how the good people of Saskatchewan feel when it comes to the socialist philosophies that are shared by our friends in the Official Opposition and their friends in the Official Opposition yet again in the great province of Saskatchewan. Congratulations to Premier Moe and to the Saskatchewan Party for soundly defeating the socialists, as I said, 46 seats to 15 seats.

9:30

Now, that was despite the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the now Leader of the Official Opposition in Alberta, the leader of the socialist party, who is standing in this Chamber fighting against a tax bill to be able to help corporations and job creators inside our province, took time out of her very busy weekend to go and campaign for the Saskatchewan NDP. She said that it would help rally the troops and be able to help defeat Scott Moe and the Sask Party. We know what the people of Saskatchewan think about the socialist party, both here and in Alberta.

With that lovely thought of encouragement for the great people of Saskatchewan, I will adjourn debate on this legislation.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 36

Geothermal Resource Development Act

[Adjourned debate October 22: Mr. Nielsen]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 36. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has five minutes remaining should he choose.

Seeing not, is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the call.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to this bill. I happen to be a firm believer in starting on a positive note, so I would like to start there, and that is to say that I think it is important to introduce regulations for geothermal in Alberta. It is definitely a good step forward to be introducing this

regulation. This regulation, of course, allows industry to have some understanding of what their environment will be moving forward, and that allows them to bring in investment because it creates certainty. So I think that the certainty that this is creating is good.

That being said, I have a number of questions. Now, of course, I want to start by saying that this isn't totally atypical. The bill is fairly high level. It's a high-level regulatory framework. A lot is left to regulations, and that's not unusual. This isn't one of those cases where they're leaving strange things to regulations. I think that most of it is usual. I think that there are, however, some pressing open questions on this bill, and that's what I'd like to start by getting into.

Of course, you know, it gives industry general direction in terms of applying to the Alberta Energy Regulator. I think that is good. The majority of the act replicates the Oil and Gas Conservation Act or has very similar provisions, in any event. It does have the benefit in some cases of those provisions having been interpreted, so people will understand what they mean, but there are instances in which I think the Oil and Gas Conservation Act is operating imperfectly, and not all of those changes have been made in this bill.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

So I'd like to – boy, there are a lot of things. How best to start? I'd like to begin by sort of talking generally about the royalty framework. You know, it's my understanding that royalties will eventually be charged but not at this time. Generally I think we need a certain amount of certainty around that because once they are in, it can be very difficult to alter them and because ultimately, especially as we move on in time, that certainty of knowing what that will be is important. I think it's important as well to the people of Alberta here. You know, if we look back in time – and I'm not wanting to relitigate old issues – if we look back 30 years ago, there are things that could have been done significantly differently in this province, and it would have put us in a significantly better position now. I think that when determinations are made as to exactly how that will be done, we need to think not just of the present but of the future. I think, you know, Premier Lougheed, a long time ago, did do that. He did do that, thinking of the future, but subsequent Conservative governments kind of let that vision of the future slide in a lot of ways.

I think that that was unfortunate for the position in which Alberta currently finds itself because we are without a large reserve to handle a transition that we know is coming, not just because of scientific reasons but because of financial ones. I think it's becoming increasingly clear that investors, who are, in my view, not generally driven by bleeding hearts, are making strategic choices and that we need to be live to those strategic choices because this is a critical moment in Alberta. It's a critical moment in which we need to think of the future of our population and of the people of this province. At the end of the day, that is what's important. How do the people of this province make it through?

That being said, I have a number of questions. One of the issues that has been raised with respect to this – and I would love to hear from the minister on this issue – has to do with the overall assignment of rights to the mineral holder. Because it was unclear previously legally in Alberta, the act assigns the rights to geothermal energy to the mineral holders, which is fine except that there is a state of the law even if it is as yet undetermined by the courts. The provisions in this bill, it has been argued by some very sharp legal minds, are not strong enough to overcome if a court were to determine that it was the case, prior to the enactment of this act, that those rights did not in fact vest in the mineral holder, that perhaps they vested in the individual with rights to the surface or in the Crown generally or in any other number of individuals. This

wouldn't be sufficient to overturn it, so that won't create a lot of certainty, which I think is a concern because the point, again, is to create certainty so that we can attract investment. I think that that's a question that I would love to see answered.

I also think, when we're talking about – in section 8(3) of the act it's clear that the liability for the well transfers to the new owner. We have, as all of us are aware, a problem with abandoned oil and gas infrastructure. This was a problem, again, that was created 30 years ago, when the regulations and the legislation were set up improperly such that sort of a large liability was allowed to build up, and the individuals who had the opportunity to profit from that activity were not also the individuals who bore the risk. What ultimately happened was that private companies profited, and the public bore the risk.

Now, certainly, I have assurances, I think, from the minister that this will involve a scheme of insurance that will operate better than this liability situation operates currently. But one thing I would like to know is – and I assume that the liability reverts to the Orphan Well Association. The liability transfers a hundred per cent to the new geothermal operator. If that geothermal operator were to go under and there were to be additional environmental liability, would that simply return to the Orphan Well Association? I think that's the case, but it's not totally clear to me, so I'd love to know the answer to that.

Another big question that has been brought to my attention, which I also noticed while reading through the act – section 19 is set up to allow entry. Now, I've been told that this is emergency entry, but it almost identically mirrors a provision from the Oil and Gas Conservation Act with the exception of subsection 5, which is absent. There is not subsection 5 in this act. The subsection 5 in the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, which obviously is not section 19 there – this is what happens when you have too many windows open.

9:40

In any event, it ultimately indicates that where there is a dispute – we're talking about entering onto the land, so essentially infringements on the right of the person who owns the surface, not the geothermal, not the person from which they're leasing. Apparently, it's meant to deal with an emergency. But normally if there's a dispute about the compensation which was paid to the holder of the surface rights for such entry, that dispute can go to the Surface Rights Board. In this case, the provision that would normally send such disputes to the Surface Rights Board is absent, so I'm curious why that is. I also think that if this is meant to deal only with emergencies, the language appears to be mirrored from elsewhere, so I'm interested in that.

I'm very, very interested as to why the Surface Rights Board is absent because the drafters would have had to basically take the language and then omit that, so it was clearly an intentional choice. I'm just curious. We haven't heard any reference to why that intentional choice was made, why it is that those disputes aren't referred there, and I think that that is a concern for individual landowners because I'm sure every member of this House is aware that there are significant and ongoing disputes about a number of issues in the Oil and Gas Conservation Act having to do with abandoned wells, having to do with entry onto land, having to do with things not being paid in a timely manner, contracts not being – and I mean, that's in a way a by-product of larger sort of global things that are going on.

But I think that this is a big concern because even though people are not necessarily entirely satisfied with the dispute mechanism that exists currently, it is a dispute resolution mechanism, and I think that individuals would like to have access to it. So I would love an answer to that question in terms of: you know, what was the

plan? Was the Surface Rights Board intentionally omitted? That I would like to hear more about. I suspect that the minister has probably – I know that they've got ongoing consultations on this issue. We have ongoing consultations on this issue. I suspect that they, too, have heard rather extensively from individuals about this concern. So those are a number of the concerns.

I'd also like a little bit more detail not just around the royalty regime but around the liability regime. We certainly don't want to create a circumstance where it's overly onerous for geothermal, but we also don't want to replicate the current orphan well situation in the province, where ultimately some individuals profited and now there's a massive liability that's potentially sort of hanging over the head of the public generally. It won't surprise anyone in this House to hear that one of the things that irritates me most about the way that some governments tend to govern is the tendency to create contracts that generate private profit and public risk, and I think there is a risk of that's happening here. Now, certainly, we do want to support the industry to develop, and we want to do that in a way that's fair to everyone and then, again, continue to consider the future of the people in this province.

Those are a few of the comments I have on this act. I think we're hoping to see greater clarity at some point. I know, again, that there are ongoing consultations, but I think, yeah, knowing what the plan is in terms of having security for those wells so that in the instance when the well goes under, this, like the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, enables the liability to follow the beneficial owner essentially, which I think is a good thing, but that is what – those provisions are identical and have been replicated from the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, and in that instance it hasn't worked enormously well. That continues to be a concern.

Now, I know my understanding, again from the government announcement, is that the process is to consult and that we'll see amendments coming forward in Committee of the Whole, so I hope that either we will get answers to the questions that we are asking or that, moving forward, amendments will be brought to alter those situations. But I do think that we do need clarity around those issues as well as clarity in terms of why the drafters chose the provision that potentially makes it insufficiently clear to vest the rights in the holders of the minerals. I realize this sounds like an enormously technical issue, but this sort of fundamental question in terms of who owns it is fundamental to developing a geothermal industry in this province, because without an answer to that question, industry lacks sufficient clarity to attract investment, which is ultimately what is necessary.

So that is a very, very long list of questions, but I would still like to say that in general the concept behind it, the concept underlying the framework, is good. As usual, the devil is always in the detail with these things. Some of that detail will obviously have to come by way of regulation, but I think additional detail around how the royalty regime will work will need to become public. I think it is important for legislators to be able to have comment on that.

That has been, I guess, a long list of questions. I am glad to see, though, that there has been a reversal in position from this government to thinking that diversification is important. I'm glad to see that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone. We have had about nine speakers on this so far, I believe, to date. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in this place and speak to the Assembly. Certainly, it's a pleasure to

speaking and perhaps provide some comments and questions to my hon. colleague here from Calgary.

It's been very interesting that a list of questions has been posed to the government that I think are very fundamental to how we do our work in this place. It's important because our Official Opposition Energy critic has asked a number of questions, and then the opposition has asked a number of questions that I think will further assist in the development of legislation as we move forward in this place. I think it's pretty disappointing that no member of the government would rise and actually reply to those questions. I think it's pretty disappointing that no member of the government would actually stand up here and explain and justify decisions that they had made, and it's pretty disappointing that the government feels it unnecessary or they are unable to answer those questions.

I mean, that's something that I think my colleague would find disappointing and is something that my colleague here who asked those questions would find troubling, because we as members of the Official Opposition and, I think, all private members in this place have a duty to ask questions of the government and debate our legislation as it's brought to this place. So, really, Mr. Speaker, when the government doesn't do their job, which is essentially what they're doing here by refusing to answer these simple questions and by refusing to actually acknowledge these questions and by refusing to stand in this place, especially right now, during this 29(2)(a), and actually engage in the dialogue, I think that's a failure of our government. It's a failure of the government to actually go out and accomplish the duties that they were sent here to do and to represent the people and to answer the questions that come forward in debate. When they sponsor legislation like this and when the Minister of Energy sponsors legislation, Albertans expect the minister to be able to stand in this place and justify and rationalize that legislation. They expect the minister, they expect all members of the government to be able to come into this place and actually debate this legislation, to actually give Albertans the answers to the difficult questions.

Of course, as my colleague from Calgary mentioned here, some of those questions appear exceptionally technical. Perhaps the minister needs some additional time to understand what those questions mean and consult with the department on some of those things, and I would look forward to having the minister come back and answer in the future if the opportunity presents itself. I know that we have many more stages to this bill. I know that we have the opportunity, again, for more here tonight and also in the future, of course, in Committee of the Whole and in third reading as well. Hopefully, those questions will become more and more clear as we proceed through debate.

9:50

Until then, Mr. Speaker, I think it's pretty clear that the government, in actually neglecting to stand and rise and answer the questions, in actually neglecting to do all those things, isn't taking this process seriously. The process of legislation and the process of actual democracy and parliamentary democracy here in the Legislature isn't being taken seriously. Indeed, the government is focusing on \$4.7 billion in corporate giveaways instead of focusing on the legislation that we should be talking about, instead of focusing on actually debating and understanding the legislation we're talking about here. I think it's pretty obvious that when the government comes forward and says that this is a bill that's going to be used to consult and potentially bring in changes and all of these things, being able to provide simple answers to the Assembly or even saying to the Assembly that the minister will return with those answers in the future is something that is fundamental to how this House should operate.

This House should have that dialogue. It should have that respectful debate. Government members get up here and espouse that all the time and talk about how they want to bring decorum back into this place, and the Premier said how he wants to raise the bar in this place, and it seems that today they are failing to do that. They are failing to actually engage in that debate, they are failing to raise the bar, they are failing to have that decorum, and I think that's something that Albertans would be pretty disappointed with. I know that my constituents, Mr. Speaker, would be disappointed if they knew that this government was refusing to answer questions. Indeed, I've had many of my constituents write to me about how disappointed they are in this very government with their refusal to engage. Many times I hear that my constituents have written questions to ministers or MLAs or that constituents from UCP ridings have written letters to their MLAs as well and have failed to receive any response. It appears that the government is taking the same tack now with the Official Opposition, the people who were sent to this place, sent to this Legislature, to actually debate these bills and actually engage in the process of democracy and passing legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's pretty clear that until we hear more from the government, until the government is actually willing to get up here and do their jobs, do their homework, and come back and actually engage with the opposition, engage in the parliamentary process, engage in the democracy that we hold so sacred here in Alberta, Albertans will continue to be disappointed. Albertans will continue to not get the answers they deserve, and the opposition will continue to need to ask these questions. We'll continue to need to have these debates, because we know that as we move forward into Committee of the Whole in the next little bit here, we'll have lots to say.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate? I believe I see the hon. Member for Calgary-North.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act. Throughout my career as an engineer I was fortunate to have been able to enjoy Alberta's economic advantage. Except for the last few years, I have witnessed economic growth in Alberta in the previous four decades while working in the energy sector. The energy sector has been and continues to be Alberta's leading source of economic revenue. Many of us in Alberta rely on the energy sector to support our families, create jobs, and maintain jobs. As we face a global pandemic, a decline in oil prices, and an OPEC Plus oil price war, it is more important than ever to diversify our economy as outlined in Alberta's recovery plan.

As we all know, the past seven to eight months have been difficult, which is why our government has launched the Alberta recovery plan. This plan centres on getting the economy back on track, creating jobs, and attracting investment. Mr. Speaker, today we are discussing the Geothermal Resource Development Act, introduced by my colleague the hon. Minister of Energy to help diversify Alberta's energy sector and attract investment.

Tapping into this form of energy would have enormous potential to diversify. This will diversify the energy sector itself, create jobs, and get Alberta's people back to work. Alberta's decades of experience in drilling of oil and gas has provided Albertans with necessary skills to develop and manage geothermal energy. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been a leader in the global energy sector, and developing geothermal energy has the potential to make Alberta a fierce competitor.

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This act introduces efficient and essential regulatory measures without compromising the red tape reduction policy that our government has laid out. Through regulations and policies the geothermal industry will create innovative opportunities while also supporting renewable resources in the current energy industry. To overcome the challenges that accompany developing this resource, legal and regulatory work is necessary because it will help attract capital and investors into this province.

Geothermal heat is a natural heat that originates from the Earth and is harvested through mechanisms such as drilling into the ground or by using hot springs to run a turbine. It can be used for heating and cooling or to generate clean electricity. It is environmentally sustainable.

Thanks to advancements in technology, geothermal energy allows Alberta the opportunity to repurpose inactive oil and gas well sites and the potential to aid industries like agriculture and forestry. Alberta's geothermal potential lies underground at approximately 3,000 metres or deeper below ground level. Currently Alberta has a policy for shallow geothermal projects which are above groundwater protection. That's why the geothermal development act introduces regulations for geothermal projects that take place below the base of groundwater protection.

The University of Alberta has been hard at work researching this untapped potential. The university has identified potential to develop it on a commercial scale for up to 6,100 megawatts of thermal power potential and 1,150 megawatts of recoverable electrical power across Alberta's municipal districts.

Mr. Speaker, currently Alberta evaluates geothermal project applications on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, developing a transparent and focused set of regulations will make the application process more efficient and transparent. Establishing clear policies that are efficient is necessary to monitor and enforce environmental controls and set parameters for companies to operate. Developing a clean energy source like geothermal will help Alberta stay competitive in the global energy market while being environmentally responsible. Pilot projects are being conducted across Alberta by various companies such as Eavor-Lite near Rocky Mountain House, Razor Energy's oil-geothermal coproduction project in Swan Hills, and Alberta No. 1, which is exploring geothermal potential near Grande Prairie.

The proposed act also creates opportunities for indigenous and rural communities that will help boost capital and Alberta's position on the international stage regarding the use of innovative and clean energy. Mr. Speaker, developing geothermal energy here in Alberta will make it an attractive investment destination. There are many advantages to harvesting and exploiting geothermal energy. Albertans have the necessary skill set to develop geothermal energy. The Geothermal Resource Development Act repurposes inactive oil and gas well sites, helps protect the environment from carbon emissions, and uses the energy's natural heat.

The abundance of natural resources in our province is overwhelming. I feel lucky to be living in a province, Mr. Speaker, that is so resource rich because it allows us to become a leader in the global energy market and remain competitive with international powerhouses. There are economic uncertainties across the world at this time, and our government recognizes the challenges Alberta faces today. That's why Alberta's recovery plan promotes and prioritizes economic diversification by tapping into its geothermal potential among other potential projects.

Alberta is a steadfast and resilient province that has the capacity and ability to develop geothermal energy, and that's why I support

Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

10:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues for this opportunity to engage in Bill 36, Geothermal Resource Development Act. I just want to start by speaking to a couple of small-scale geothermal projects that are in my constituency that I'm very excited and proud of. One is through Brentwood Homes, which is in Woodcroft. For anyone who spends time shopping at Westmount mall, it's just north of Westmount. I see my colleague from Edmonton-North West definitely spends time at Westmount mall. And this project has been – I think the building is more than a decade old now, probably 15 years. It's in the middle of multifamily, quite high-density housing. It's part of a building where almost everyone who lives there is an AISH recipient on a very limited fixed income, and this is one of the ways that heating and water can be included in rent: the building operators are able to keep their costs incredibly low through geothermal and solar, significant instalments that are on that site. That's one that I'm excited about, and that's been in place, yeah, for about 15 years.

Then there's another one that was built in the time of the last term of government, and it's through the Right at Home Housing Society. It's in North Glenora. It's a really amazing community initiative. There was a church that was not well attended on a massive corner lot, I believe an Anglican church, and the community and the church entered into conversations. What the church wanted was a long-term sustainable building to run church services in and to not have to worry about maintenance, upkeep, and liabilities. The Right at Home Housing Society ended up partnering with them. I think they had a different name at that time – I can't remember exactly – but they became the Right at Home Housing Society, and they partnered with energy-efficient builders to make sure that they had one of the most economically and environmentally sustainable buildings in my riding.

What's also really exciting is that it's across the street from a school that was underenrolled at the time and that the community opted for three-, four-, and five-bedroom units to be built there townhouse-style. There are so many kids who live in this building now as a result because there are so many multiple bedrooms, and some of them have multigenerational families living in them. It is an incredible use of this asset, that this church has partnered with Right at Home Housing Society and with the community to provide, and government did invest some money. While we were in government, we invested \$6 million to help the project come to fruition so that affordable housing could come into the neighbourhood, energy-efficient housing could come into the neighbourhood, and about 150 kids could come into the neighbourhood, who are going to the local elementary, junior, and senior high schools, which have been a really positive boost to the overall community.

It's been done in a way that is not only sustainable socially, as I mentioned, in having all these larger units where families with multiple children – many are newcomers to Canada – have an opportunity to be full participants in the community. But the energy-efficient and the geothermal components make this building something that I think we all aspire for in terms of sustainability or I hope that we all aspire for. It's been recognized with a number of

different local and national recognitions for the innovation that was done there. Again, the congregation continues to gather but in a building that is brand new – it's beautiful – and they have far fewer responsibilities with not a large congregation to upkeep. So it certainly is an exciting win for the church community, win for the neighbourhood community, certainly a win for the residents who live in these buildings, and, I would also say, a win for the school and for the sustainability of a great local neighbourhood school.

I have to say that there are a couple of these projects that I was happy to be able to highlight. Certainly, when I picked up Bill 36, that was one of the first things I thought about, some of the small successes but successes that we have. Certainly, I know that the leader of my party, the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Official Opposition, and our entire caucus are very keen to see diversification as an actual focus of any government here in Alberta. We know that it's important that we have good, sustainable, long-term, productive jobs and economies. I'm very proud to be somebody who grew up, who was born and raised in a province that has a very strong and rich energy sector, and I want to ensure that that's the case in a diversified way for future generations as well.

I think a number of very important questions have been raised by our Energy critic, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, that I do hope the government responds to in a timely fashion because, of course, I think the concepts that are being presented are ones that most of us probably agree with, but we want to make sure that the specific details that have been raised and questions that have been asked so far are answered and any additional questions that come forward.

I want to highlight one area of the bill which was touched on briefly by my colleague. It's under section 19, entry on land. Specifically, I'm going to talk about subsection (2). It reads, "A person shall, before entering on any land under subsection (1), give prior written notice of the person's intention to enter to the owner and to the occupant, unless it is impractical under the circumstances to do so." That is a huge gap that's being created. The first part says "shall," that it's an actual requirement, and it says "written notice," but then there's a huge swath created by government in this wording where it says "unless it is impractical under the circumstances to do so."

If something is so important that it shall be done and it must be done in writing, then why would we deviate from that and create such a massive – I don't want to say "loophole" because I certainly hope that that isn't the intention – area for the "shall" and the "must" to be ignored in such a substantive way? That is an important area that I would love to hear anyone from the government caucus respond to with some very clear rationale as to why "unless it is impractical" was added to the bill, because that is a huge waiver of responsibility and probably of liability. I'm guessing that government was wanting to create fewer liabilities for, probably, energy companies who might need to access these sites, but I'd like to have further clarification on that.

In section 19(3) it says:

If a person who attempts to enter [the] land under subsection (1) is prevented from entering, that person may apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an order permitting the person to enter . . . the land for the purposes specified in the order, and an order so made may be enforced by the sheriff.

Again, this speaks to – in the previous section we talk about giving prior written notice, but it doesn't say that the prior written notice needs to say what the purpose is.

It's being anticipated that somebody might prevent someone from accessing their land or the work site, so why wouldn't we specify under the written notice section in subsection (2) the requirement to say what the purpose is of the access? That might be a way to prevent future court challenges where right now we're essentially saying that if somebody attempts to access the land –

and hopefully they've given notice – but they are not permitted by the occupant or by the landlord or landowner to access that site, then they need to go to court, and then they need to give a reason to the courts, and that reason needs to be put in the permit. Why wouldn't we say that in the prior written notice the purpose for access be identified? I think that that would be a way to streamline things a bit and create a greater understanding between the person who's there to access the site or the land and the people who might be preventing that from happening. I think that that's a question that I would also like the government to answer.

10:10

"A person who enters . . . land under subsection (1) shall compensate the land owner or occupant for direct expenses and for any damage to the land owner's or occupant's land, crop or livestock arising directly from that entry." I think this language, when I started reading that section, that probably was pulled from other oil and gas legislation around accessing land for the purpose of servicing wells and other pieces. But when I think about specifically the scope of geothermal and some of the scale, I'm wondering if that's the best comparator. Perhaps it is. Again I'd like to have some clarity, ideally from the sponsoring government minister but, if not, from members of the government caucus, to be able to give that clarity to these three subsections, (2), (3), and (4), under section 19.

Those are a couple of the points that I wanted to raise at this stage in the reading, and hopefully we can get some greater clarity in response to those points that I've raised as well as the points that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has raised. I think that in theory we want to get behind this bill and we want to be able to support it, but certainly greater confidence and greater understanding around some of the choices that the government has made to date would make it easier for us to do that because I do in my heart of hearts believe that Albertans want a diversified economy. They keep telling us that over and over again. They don't want us to give up existing segments within the existing economy, but they know that it's important to have diversified, revenue-diversified economies for the long-term sustainability of our province and for their own individual long-term economic sustainability as well.

When I look at some folks who I think have been very effective in diversifying their economic streams for individual households, for example, I'm thinking of people I know who are in the arts community in the visual arts who have worked not only to make sure that they do fine art, which is often a passion, or specific commissions, which is also a lot of fun, but many work to ensure that they have a stream that's related to public art as well and public beautification of our cities or our communities or our counties or MDs because they want to ensure that they're contributing to the larger side of it, the economic security that you get from having a large-scale project like public art or art that's displayed in large corporate environments, certainly, as well.

Then, of course, many teach as well, teach to foster other artists but also to create additional economic revenue streams for their own families. I don't think anyone would say that that artist who happens to do fine art, commissioned art, public art, and teaches is not an artist. They certainly are. They're smart artists who've diversified the revenue streams they have to be able to focus and provide for their families and for themselves.

I certainly want to continue to be an energy province. I want to be able to have long-term economic and environmental, sustainable energy practices in this province. When I think about the example of a visual artist working in all those different mediums and different strategies to diversify their family's income and being able to focus on their strengths and talent, which is certainly being an

can make sure that we are working in renewables, and I know that we can get more value-add out of the raw resources that we do have.

For those reasons, at this point I hope that the government does get back to us with some answers on the questions that we've raised because I think that it's important for all of us to have the information to support us in making the best decisions around this legislation and any other piece of legislation that comes forward in this House. Those are a couple of the points that I wanted to raise at this point in debate, and I do sincerely hope that government members fight to get up next and be able to answer some of the questions that I've raised as well as my colleague for Calgary-Mountain View because I think it would help us with the process and with our confidence in this legislation as we move forward.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should we have any takers.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak today in support of Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act. Albertans are certainly growing tired of these unprecedented times we are living in. They're asking for results, and our government is delivering through economic and energy programs such as geothermal energy. Alberta's thriving energy sector used to be the driving force of our economy. It insulated us from the economic frustrations that ran rampant through eastern Canada. However, under previous governments taxes were raised on our province's job creators, even as global oil prices were dropping.

Mr. Speaker, we've been looking for opportunities to grow and innovate. Alberta's government has been growing in new sectors and expanding old ones into new areas of innovation and technology, looking for ways to renew the Alberta advantage while modernizing our power generation industry. Geothermal energy is a solution to this challenge. It is a solution to generating clean, efficient, and cost-effective electricity and providing it directly to municipalities, indigenous communities, industries, and rural areas of the province. This is an exciting prospect as the tools and resources are already available to build and use geothermal in Alberta. We're able to repurpose inactive oil and gas wells and sites. Not only are we reusing and recycling existing infrastructure such as wellbores, roads, and pad sites, we're also reducing the time it takes to construct and bring online a geothermal plan.

In my own riding of Drumheller-Stettler we're looking at an abundance of orphan wells. Through Bill 36 our government sets out the framework that will ensure geothermal projects can use these existing orphan wells to reach the necessary ground level to generate heat.

Albertans also provide advantages to the emerging industry. Our made-in-Alberta technical engineering and decades of drilling and geological expertise make us a very attractive option to invest in with confidence for positive results. While it is unfortunate to see so many talented and hard-working oil and gas workers out of a job, there is hope with new opportunities in geothermal power. This is a perfect example of bridging our specialized oil and gas and technical drilling sector in a new and emerging energy sector. Albertans are innovative, and applying this quality to geothermal energy provides us an option to not only reclaim but also repurpose those sites, providing a real advantage to the province and to the rest of the country.

Three pilot geothermal projects are already under way in our province. Razor Energy is piloting a coproduction project from the Swan Hills mature oil field. This project, done in conjunction with the U of A, will combine the power of geothermal energy with existing oil and gas infrastructure. This project will allow us to retrofit geothermal energy technology on to the existing oil and gas framework. Not only will this project be environmentally friendly, providing a renewable source of energy, but the technology will also reduce the cost in infrastructure needed to bring electricity to Alberta's grid.

The other two, one from Alberta No. 1 near Grande Prairie and the other from Eavor near Rocky Mountain House, are testing the potential of geothermal to supply heat and power to the communities. This technology, demonstrated in the Eavor project, has prospects for commercial development and export opportunities.

This bill helps to provide clarity on the policy and regulatory requirements surrounding this emerging industry. This current legislative framework does not address or regulate geothermal resource development and, as such, approvals for projects are on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, this bill is an incredible opportunity for our province to compete with other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan and B.C., who already have regulations in place.

During the last campaign we unveiled a detailed plan for geothermal energy in Alberta. We intend to deliver on the mandate to get geothermal up and running as we strive to get Alberta's economy back on track and to bring quality jobs back to our province. By proposing the creation of new enactments, we will be able to establish a legislative framework that balances the need for certainty and clarity while preserving the flexibility to adapt to a growing sector. Our recovery is based on common-sense projects such as geothermal. Bringing balance back to Alberta's finances and creating investor confidence is a must.

Mr. Speaker, governments past may have been opposed to Alberta's oil and gas sector, opening our doors to environmentalists who kneecapped our sector with their constant campaigns. As much as they may object, geothermal is a solution for a clean renewable resource. It will get Albertans back to work and back to more than a job, back to a career that they have trained for. I urge everyone in this House to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be any takers.

Seeing none, are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

10:20

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this has been enjoyable, I would like to move to adjourn debate on Bill 36.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: I see the same hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 27, 2020.

The Acting Speaker: Tomorrow. Yeah. Okay. I was trying to figure out which day we were talking about. For clarity, tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:21 p.m.]

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