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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, October 27, 2020

Day 58

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 27, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 38 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the second reading of Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act contains proposed changes to six pieces of legislation: the Police Act, the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the Jury Act, the Referendum Act, the Queen's Counsel Act, and the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. The amendment would recognize First Nations police services and police commissions in legislation; modernize the jury selection process; streamline court procedures, access and flexibility; expand Queen's Counsel qualification requirements; reduce red tape; and minor housekeeping changes.

Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to address the changes to the Police Act. First Nations policing is currently not included in the Police Act. This is wrong, especially as First Nations policing has been around in Alberta for more than three decades. While the Police Act did come into force before First Nations policing was a reality in the province, this omission has yet to be rectified, so unequal standing for these police services and commissions compared to their municipal counterparts persists to this day.

Bill 38 contains two sets of amendments to the Police Act. The first is a critical step in providing recognition and equity for First Nations police services and commissions and showing our commitment to fair access to police services for all Albertans. Declaring First Nations police services as equivalent to municipal police services in legislation will boost the morale of our First Nations police services and give First Nations police chiefs the ability to finally appoint their own officers. First Nations police services have told us that being excluded has created a lack of equity in the legislation.

The second change, Mr. Speaker, to the Police Act is technical and minor. It is to simply update population references for communities and bring them in line with prior changes to regulations made under the Municipal Government Act. In other words, we are making sure we use the same source as Treasury Board and Finance for population figures as do the rest of the ministries in the government of Alberta.

With respect to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, Mr. Speaker, there are five amendments proposed for this act. This act sets out the how-to for enforcing provincial and municipal bylaw offences. Two amendments would streamline procedures for law enforcement, saving time and resources. The first would allow peace officers to prove they served a ticket by written statement. This statement will be considered to be made under oath so officers don't need to appear before a commissioner of oaths. The second would allow tickets for more types of offences to be served by mail.

Another amendment, Mr. Speaker, will save the courts time by streamlining the procedure for persons applying to set aside their

convictions in absentia. These changes will allow people 30 days to apply, eliminating the need to go before a commissioner of oaths to swear an affidavit. To increase access to the court and allow for more flexibility in court matters, the amendment would allow justices to let parties take part in trials and hearings remotely by videoconference or telephone. This would increase access to justice, particularly in areas of rural Alberta.

Other amendments would allow routine court matters to be dealt with by telephone, e-mail, or electronic means and let First Nations use ticketing provisions to enforce bylaw offences.

Finally, housekeeping changes would remove reference to a regulation that prescribes the locations of provincial court offices in Alberta and add a reference to paying tickets online.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Jury Act, an amendment to the Jury Act also is included in Bill 38. The amendment would remove the requirement that a juror summons be in a specific form and allow summons to be served by e-mail. This would result in courts being better able to adapt to changes, and sending summonses electronically will save time and resources for the benefit of those using our justice system. The amendments to the Jury Act and Provincial Offences Procedure Act have the support of the judiciary, and I am confident that Albertans will see these changes, while minor, as a true modernization of our justice system.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Referendum Act, we passed the Referendum Act because Albertans should have a direct say on important matters that affect their day-to-day lives. Referendums enhance democracy and enable real debate on specific issues which involve all citizens, not just politicians and the media. A minor change to the act would allow referendums and Senate elections to be held at the same time during a municipal election. Holding a referendum as part of municipal elections would allow for efficiencies to cover costs.

Mr. Speaker, amendments to the Queen's Counsel Act would allow us to recognize and celebrate the contributions of more exceptional lawyers with diverse backgrounds. Right now, the Queen's Counsel Act restricts appointment to those who are entitled to practise in the superior courts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland, or Canada for at least 10 years. This excludes some members of the Law Society of Alberta, who make valuable contributions in our province.

The proposed amendment will expand qualification requirement to include almost all Commonwealth jurisdictions, those that incorporate or use common-law principles as the basis, in whole or part, for the legal system. Right now there is no set amount of time a lawyer has to be entitled to practise in Alberta to be eligible for a Queen's Counsel appointment. Amendments in Bill 38 will require lawyers entitled to practise in a superior court in a Commonwealth jurisdiction other than Canada to have been entitled to practise for at least a 10-year period, including in Alberta, for a minimum of five years to be considered for an appointment. This would impose a new restriction on those entitled to practise in the United Kingdom as these lawyers will also have to practise in Alberta for at least five years. Other provinces have minimum practice requirements in their jurisdictions.

Moving on to the final change, we have an opportunity to reduce red tape. We are proposing to automatically revoke a Queen's Counsel appointment when a lawyer is disbarred or resigns in the face of discipline and is deemed to have been disbarred. This would replace the current route of requiring the Lieutenant Governor in Council to revoke the Queen's Counsel appointment.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, amendments to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act will take away more tools of the trade from criminals as well as their ill-gotten profits. Doing so helps reduce crime and increase community safety. Expanding the

offences that are eligible for civil forfeiture would help deter a larger variety of crimes. The changes in Bill 38 would let the government use proceeds of crime to recover the cost of running the civil forfeiture program instead of relying on taxpayers. Make no mistake, though. The government would still use the proceeds of crime to fund grants for community crime prevention and victims of crime initiatives. In addition, we will use the proceeds of crime for law enforcement grants. This will be available to police agencies and would ultimately help police reduce crime and deter criminals from Alberta communities, and it would allow us to strike the right balance between support for law enforcement and support for community groups.

7:40

The changes to this act also support red tape reduction by getting rid of never-used portions of the act and reflect support to victims now provided through the restitution and recovery program.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that the amendments in the Justice Statutes Amendment Act would help us streamline and modernize the jury selection process and some corporate procedures, provide greater access to justice, and also recognize First Nations police services and even more Alberta lawyers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading and urge all members to support this important legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General has moved second reading of Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this evening? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Meadows has the call.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity. This is my pleasure to rise in the House and add comments to Bill 38, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. We do support access to justice for all. We support indigenous self-determination, including through the creation of First Nations police services. For the sake of all concerned, we will seek to clarify logistics and operations of this proposal. We believe that it is a critically important step, it deserves our full attention, and could easily be a stand-alone piece of legislation.

The government also chose to slide many other changes in this piece of legislation, which they didn't talk as much about, that will amend different aspects of the justice system with serious implications for Albertans. This does not do justice with these changes. This bill doesn't say anything about the key issues that are top of mind for Albertans, their communities, and municipalities: the cuts that the UCP government have brought to police budgets across the province. Instead, the Premier and the UCP are doubling down on their failed plan to give more than \$4.7 billion to already profitable corporations while defunding police services such as \$30 million in cuts to Calgary Police Service alone. Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve a government that has their backs and that has a real plan to ensure physical and economic security of Albertans.

This bill would have changes to the Police Act: now it applies to indigenous police services. Mr. Speaker, there are about 46 First Nations communities in Alberta with a population ranging from small to 15 to 4,535, ranges as the stats say. Treaty 7 has a total population of 15,699; Treaty 6, total population of 22,050; and Treaty 8 has a population over 21,000. Currently only three First Nations have their own police. By saying that this change, supported by the First Nations – and we support this, too, but we have some concerns, First Nations have concerns, and Albertans do

have concerns. We wanted to see if the government did consult First Nations. Has the government consulted, and who have they consulted? Who were their representatives?

Has the government done an economic impact study on where the funds will come from? How will this be implemented? If the government does have work on this, we would like to know if the government can share this information with the House. Also, if we have, you know, put the emphasis on the financial aspect, who is going to be responsible for the cost of indigenous policing? If it is the federal government, what steps will the government take to ensure that First Nation police services have similar resources as other municipalities in the province?

First Nations have been asking for alternative dispute resolution or traditional, culturally relevant means of criminal justice to be considered. Would the indigenous police services be empowered to use these methods? These are some of the questions we would, you know, be happy to know the minister's stance on and if this information was actually taken into consideration and if that was part of the consultation.

Would the jurisdictions of indigenous policing be solely geographic? If so, what happens if a person who is not a member of the First Nations communities commits a crime on that jurisdictional community's land? Will the First Nation police have the power to arrest someone outside of the community for an offence committed in their jurisdictions? Some of these questions need to be answered.

Which enactments such as the Criminal Code of Canada or the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act would First Nations policing be empowered to police?

What relations would First Nations police forces have with the RCMP or the neighbouring municipal police forces? How will equalization of services between First Nations communities be assured so that there are not have communities and have-not communities?

How and when will the changes referred to in section 33.3 be made? Are there any changes that the government is considering now?

The Jury Act allows jury summons to be sent by electronic means. It is a reasonable change given technological advancement and given the COVID situation we are going through. We support this change. The amendment refers to "using information obtained under the authority of an enactment or with the person's consent." We would be happy to, you know, listen to the minister if he can provide some more information and enlighten us on that, on which enactments it could be referring to in section 2(b). How will a person's consent be obtained under section 2(b)?

As we all know, junk e-mail filters can be overzealous, and some people, despite having e-mail addresses, do not check them regularly. You know, personally, I would say that even being a very techie person, we do miss things due to busy schedules, and people have not developed the habit to randomly stay on media. What strategies are there to address this given that a failure to respond to a summons is an offence? This is a very important aspect that I will say we need to focus on. We definitely need to consider the consequences as this is such an important point, the person's obligation to respond in a timely manner if this thing happens. What are the remedies? What are other solutions to that?

7:50

The Provincial Offences Procedure Act and the Police Act. It adds amendments to the Police Act regarding indigenous police services, which is good. We understand it no longer requires police to appear in person for an affidavit of evidence, which may have implications for the procedural fairness aspect of the trial. It allows

teleconferencing for aspects of a trial, which is fine, I think, as we mentioned. Going into this technological age, there are certain points we need to consider. We are fine with it, and we support it.

Questions in regard to this can be raised as during the pandemic teleconferencing technology was used in court proceedings. Are there any lessons to be learned from that experience? What was the feedback from the stakeholders during this experience in the past? How will people's right to a fair trial be protected if police were no longer to appear in person for affidavits of evidence? Does it take the opportunity away to cross-examine officers? When will defence counsel have the opportunity to cross-examine police regarding evidence if the police are no longer required to appear in person?

As we said, we are very happy to discuss and we're happy to see this piece of legislation coming into the House, and there are a number of changes we support. As this is my very first chance to look into this, there are a number of concerns, a number of questions, genuine questions that, I would say, would probably have necessarily been discussed or considered by the ministry or the people who have drafted the bill. The minister probably would already have discussed or, you know, addressed the issues while drafting this bill.

In the House we will be happy to learn about some of those questions and concerns that are coming from the communities. They are coming from the stakeholders as well as the House member on behalf of my constituents. It will be very helpful to know the answers and the government's stance, the information on those.

Regarding the changes to section 5, is the government trying to change the burden of proof?

Regarding section 31(5)(c), will the government be using registry data? Is this a common practice? What safeguards will the government put into place to protect people's data? Was there any consultation or cross-jurisdictional analysis done where the government can probably share the information with us? If the government has done the background work on that, we will be happy to know the information on that.

The other aspect. As this is an omnibus bill, I could say that the changes to the Justice Statutes Amendment Act probably could have been done in one bill, but as the minister has already, you know, detailed, this bill deals with six different acts.

The other thing, of course, is that the Queen's Counsel Act adds entitlement to Queen's Counsel status for 10 years' practice in superior courts in common-law Commonwealth jurisdictions, automatic revocation of Queen's Counsel status upon disbarment or resignation pending disciplinary action. The concerns regarding this amendment: why is this amendment to Queen's Counsel status in the middle of an economic downturn and a pandemic? Who, specifically, was being asked, and why did the government decide to consider this specifically and, you know, stick it into this legislation? Who thought it was important to bring it in? What kind of demand? Who were we listening to? Who did we consult? There are more important things to focus on.

As I mentioned, we did not really hear that there was a demand for changes. If the government members or the minister had information, we would be happy to also know as we are at the very preliminary stage of debating this bill. We will appreciate any information regarding this that the minister can share with the House. These changes, we think, still do not provide objective, competency-based criteria for awarding Queen's Counsels. How many Queen's Counsels are there in the province, and how many of them are women? How many more lawyers will be eligible for Queen's Counsel status with this change? Why do we feel the need to continue awarding Queen's Counsel status when this government has used it as a token for their donors? Such actions have

undermined the value of the designation as the current act allows experience from any common-law Commonwealth jurisdictions, provinces in Canada.

The Court of Queen's Bench operates on civil law traditions. Do they not qualify for Queen's Counsel designation? That is the question that needs to be addressed. If that has been taken into consideration while drafting this legislation, it will be really helpful for us if the minister can share some information on that.

The other part of this bill is the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. The victims restitution fund is typically \$2.5 million a year. It's expected to be \$1 million this year. What forfeitures apply? Let's see. It applies civil forfeitures to breaches of any laws around the world. Will there be a clear list of enactments that civil forfeiture applies to? It removes power from the Lieutenant Governor in Council to decide which laws or regulations civil forfeitures apply to. The question is: who will make those decisions now? That seems like quite a huge change in this. That will be valuable to, you know, know. This will be important information to share.

8:00

It removes the restitution assistance program, removes claims of restitution when victims are unknown, allows the funds to be used for police training and operations, and allows the general revenue fund to be reimbursed from this fund for operational costs. Is the government trying to make up for the cuts to policing in this? We have seen that the other bill – I forgot the exact title of that. That was the victims of . . .

An Hon. Member: Crime fund.

Mr. Deol: . . . crime fund. You know, we exactly see the pattern under those protection acts and safety measures. We constantly see that and the attack on victims' funds. This is a related concern that was not really addressed, the concerns why the Alberta associations have been working for a long time in the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in debate on Bill 38 today? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to provide my support and voice my thoughts about Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the minister for introducing Bill 38 and for taking the lead to make sure our justice system is modernized and that victims affected by crime are supported and protected while public safety is maintained.

The Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, contains proposed amendments to the Police Act, the Jury Act, the Queen's Counsel Act, the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the Referendum Act, and the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. These amendments will recognize the importance of the First Nations policing, modernize and increase the efficiency of the justice system, ultimately lessening the crime rate in Alberta.

The Police Act. Mr. Speaker, for more than two decades policing facilities have not formally recognized the important role our First Nations police services play in our province. The Police Act was enacted in 1988 and has not been reviewed for any changes since then while the First Nations police services were established years after that, particularly the Blood Tribe Police Service in 1991, Tsuut'ina Nation police in 2004, Lakeshore Regional police in 2008. The act allows for the First Nations police services to comply with provincial guidelines without any specific recognition of the First Nations.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to note that there will be meetings with the indigenous stakeholders to practically discuss the First Nations policing program. The program is responsible for funding the Blood Tribe Police Service, Lakeshore Regional police, and Tsuut'ina Nation police. These changes to the Police Act will acknowledge the valuable role our First Nations policing plays in Alberta. It will ensure that First Nations police services and the communities they serve can benefit from the efforts to modernize policing in Alberta. The First Nations police services currently don't have the privilege to serve in their own offices. The amendments will permit the police chiefs the ability to do so. This legislation will ensure that future changes resulting from the current Police Act review apply to the First Nations police services in Alberta and, as well, ensure that they remain liable to their communities and responsive to the needs of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to voice that these changes will not create any additional responsibilities for the First Nations police department. It is only about formally recognizing the decades of hard work the First Nations police services have dedicated in supporting and protecting the communities of Alberta.

Now the Jury Act. Mr. Speaker, Bill 38 provisions amending the Jury Act will maintain the safety in the communities. As it continues to be our priority, the Alberta government is working closely with the directions of the public health officials to ensure that health and safety in Alberta's courts are protected. These changes would give the courts a chance to modernize the court processes and make the jury-selection procedure more efficient. Bill 38 will make changes to the Jury Act that will allow juror summons to be sent electronically, such as e-mail, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that there will be no more using of the regulated juror summons form while allowing the court to quickly adapt the form when needed. Mr. Speaker, by making use of technology in order to modernize the Alberta jury-selection process, it will allow the courts more flexibility and ensure the selection process is more effective.

The Queen's Counsel Act. Mr. Speaker, the bill also amends the Queen's Counsel Act, which will allow Alberta to recognize and celebrate the contributions of exceptional lawyers. This opportunity will award the lawyers who make outstanding contributions to their communities and have been part of Alberta's legal profession and public life. Bill 38 introduces changes on the eligibility for Queen's Counsel, or QC, appointment, which will include individuals who practise in almost all Commonwealth jurisdictions and those that base their legal system in common law. This will allow the government to appoint other deserving Alberta lawyers that have worked hard in helping and supporting individuals in communities. These changes will also reduce red tape by automatically revoking a QC appointment if a lawyer is dismissed or resigns in the face of discipline and is deemed to be disbarred.

Provincial Offences Procedure Act. Mr. Speaker, Bill 38 also carries changes to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act which will allow Albertans to participate in trials and hearings by video conferencing or telephone and would allow entering pleas, setting trial days, and requesting adjournments to be done by telephone, e-mail, and other electronic means instead of having to go to court in person. The amendments would also simplify court procedures by removing the need for law enforcement officers to file an affidavit to prove they issued a ticket or for people to file an affidavit when they need to set aside a conviction. This would also allow tickets for other types of offences to be served by mail, which will permit more time for law enforcement to focus on priority tasks. These changes will also allow the freedom for First Nations police services to use tickets to enforce their bylaws, which is a more

efficient and effective procedure, instead of having to file each individual charge with the court.

The Referendum Act. Mr. Speaker, minor changes to the Referendum Act will allow referendums and Senate elections to be held during the same municipal elections. Albertans should have a direct say on important matters that affect their day-to-day lives. It is democratic expression of the will of the people and an important procedure in making major decisions rather than providing the sole decision-making power to the government authorities. It also strengthens our democratic institutions by giving Albertans a louder voice and a better chance to be considered, with more participation and a direct role in our sovereign system. Referendums enhance democracy, enable real debate on specific issues, which will allow the involvement of all citizens, not just politicians and media. Holding a referendum as part of municipal elections will allow for efficiencies to cover costs.

The Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. Mr. Speaker, this bill will also make changes to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act which will enable Alberta to take away more criminals' tools of the trade and their profit to help reduce crime and increase community safety. Additionally, the proposed changes would expand the offences that are eligible for civil forfeiture, which will help deter a larger variety of crimes.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, instead of relying on utilizing taxpayers' money, these changes will let the government use the proceeds of crime to recover the costs of running the civil forfeiture program. This change will align Alberta with all other jurisdictions in Canada that have this legislation. The government will still use the proceeds of crime grants for community crime prevention and victims of crime initiatives. To be clear, legislation will ensure all the property connected to serious offences may be forfeited. Making grants available to police agencies will help police reduce crimes and deter criminals in Alberta communities. It will allow us to strike the right balance between support for law enforcement and support for community groups. The changes also support red tape reduction by getting rid of never-used portions of the act, and they reflect that supports to victims now have been provided through the restitution recovery program.

Mr. Speaker, our communities and Albertans waited too long for the previous government to take action. It is finally time to amend and legislate laws that will help Albertans get the support in a system they deserve. These additions will help communities and individuals to cope with trauma and help further strengthen the promotion of public safety. The constituents of Calgary-East have been eager to see these changes that will ensure and enhance public safety in our province. They have been in careful watch for the security of their communities as criminal activities happen when no one is observing. With these changes, the safety of everyone is strengthened.

Let me just conclude by saying that our priority is to support, strengthen, and modernize our justice system. We want Albertans in all communities to feel safe. I hope these changes being introduced by Bill 38 are taken into serious consideration. It is all about providing a better, up-to-date service to ensure that the safety of all Albertans is protected by the law.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for listening and for helping communities and ensuring that the safety of Albertans is our first priority.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Yellow – West Henday.

Mr. Carson: It's a beautiful constituency over in West Yellowhead but not quite as nice as Edmonton-West Henday, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, and I appreciate the comments that we've heard this evening and throughout the debate on this piece of legislation. I would start off by echoing some of the comments of my colleagues here in the NDP caucus, in the opposition. You know, when we look at the acts that are being amended through this piece of legislation, whether we're talking about the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the Jury Act, the Referendum Act, the Police Act, there are several important pieces of legislation that have been combined in here, kind of in true UCP fashion. An omnibus bill, I would contend, is before us, and we're being asked to vote on it as one entire bill. While we see certain sections of this legislation that, you know, I might be willing to support, maybe several even – we'll see how this debate continues – I am very concerned with the barrage of different pieces of legislation that really have no connection to each other that we're seeing within Bill 38.

You know, when I look through what is being proposed by the Justice minister here – and I want to congratulate that minister on his new appointment in that role, and I'm sure he will do a fine job at that – at specifically the changes that are proposed in the Referendum Act, we talk about allowing referendums to be held through the municipal elections, during that time if it coincides with that timing. The fact is that as we look back on just last spring, the bills that came before us – Bill 26, Bill 27, Bill 29 – the changes that were proposed through those pieces of legislation to, of course, Senate referendum, the introduction of a Senate referendum election, which, really, as much as it feels good, has no bearing on the federal government, whether they decide to follow through with that or not. So here we see once again the allowance and the prevalence of large amounts of money being reintroduced into the election process and the referendum process. Just as I had concerns with those pieces of legislation back then, whether we're talking about the Senate referendum legislation, whether we're talking about the changes to other pieces around the amount of spending that can happen and the changes that happened to municipal election funding, many concerns have arisen when that legislation came forward.

Even before that, when the consultation process happened, I know that the city of Edmonton, many councillors said: one of our main concerns, if you're going to address anything in here, is that you ensure that the funding for municipal elections and municipal councillors – that funding should be produced and shown before the election day so that people can understand and see where the money is coming from for these municipal politicians, because we often see that certain special-interest groups decide on a candidate, and they fund those elections for the benefit of themselves.

That is fine. That is part of democracy, but the very least we should be doing – well, part of democracy. I think, personally, that people should be more important than corporations donating, just as we had introduced in 2015 in Bill 1, ensuring that corporations and unions could not donate to elections. But, at the very least, this government should have had the willingness to introduce transparency to the ability of this money from special-interest groups to flow to municipal councillors. Unfortunately, they didn't even follow through with that. So while we see the floodgates open from the changes that have been made through Bill 26, Bill 27, Bill 29 – you know, we talked about restrictions on the amount of money a single person could offer under our legislation when we

became government in 2015. The undoing of all of that by this UCP government and the ability for a single person to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars now between the Senate referendum elections, between the provincial elections and the terrible rules that were created by the minister under this government around municipal elections: it's an absolute disaster.

While we haven't even seen what that is going to mean for democracy on a municipal level, with the municipal elections just around the corner, this government is going a step further in introducing the idea of referendums happening at that very same time. I will state again, just as I stated back then, that I am not against referendums. I think that they are, once again, an important part of our democracy. But the idea around referendums that this government has introduced is that, at the end of the day, special-interest groups will have the most ability to create or influence these referendums, and they will have the highest ability to spend as much money as possible through that. At the end of the day, it's an issue that's brought forward that has wide support from all people. Well, that's perfect. Then we should move forward with that.

But I also worry greatly that this government will use it as an opportunity to introduce ideas for referendums that will greatly benefit or greatly propel certain segments of the population to go to the polls, whether it be conservatives or whether it be progressives to stay home for whatever reason it may be. Referendums will in fact have an influence on the outcome of municipal elections, in my opinion.

While this government wants to talk about increasing democracy in the province, what they've really done, once again, is open the floodgates for money to come in an abundance. When we see the Referendum Act changes within this legislation or the introduction of referendums to municipal elections, I have many questions for this minister about what it means for funding. Is there going to be extra funding attached in terms of how much money can be spent for these referendums, how much money can be spent around municipal elections? Is the transparency of who's spending money on these referendums at that time and who's influencing the vote on those referendums – once again, as we raise concerns around Senate elections, who gets to choose what the final question will be in that referendum? Is it the people that are bringing it forward, or will it be the Premier and the government, as we saw in the introduction of previous referendum amendments?

8:20

Once again, while we have a government and a government caucus who are so quick to make changes to referendums and make changes to our Election Act, I will point out once again that we continue to be in the middle of an RCMP investigation into the governing party's, well, actions during their leadership race. While that has not concluded and we continue to wait for answers from the RCMP and many of my colleagues on the UCP side in this very Legislature have been interviewed as a part of that investigation, this government is quickly continuing to change rules around elections and around referendums and how and where and when people can vote and how much can be spent. That is very concerning to me, Mr. Speaker.

That is one piece of this omnibus bill that I'm very concerned about, and I don't think it's a small change by any means. I appreciate that the idea of referendums was in this government's platform, though obviously they didn't go into great detail about who would be choosing those questions or who would be allowed to spend money and many more questions that arise around that.

Once again, when we talk about the changes that were made in those three bills – 26, 27, 29 – in the spring session and we look at the proposals that are in here around changes around referendums

for municipal elections, I have to ask: who was consulted on this legislation? When we talk about which municipalities were consulted and their questions reflected upon, did they get those answers? They did not, during those initial bill consultations on 26, 27, 29, feel that they were properly consulted, or if they were consulted, they were not listened to, by any means. What municipal councillors want for their elections is the opposite of what this UCP government did. They asked for more transparency. They asked for higher spending limits, not opening up the floodgates, as this UCP government has done.

We raised concerns back then: with the proposals made in those three bills, how quickly would we be back here talking about changes to our local elections? Well, here we are, not very many months later, with zero indication that this government did consultation with our municipal councillors and municipal governments, with our towns and counties, and that is very concerning.

Once again, when we talk about, “Who’s responsible for the costs of referendums?” that is another very important question. Is the government going to put these costs that – you know, as I mentioned earlier, it may be most beneficial to the government caucus to put forward these referendum questions, depending on if they want to once again try and encourage certain segments of the population to go out and vote in municipal elections. We know that this government has a vested interest in doing that because as they potentially get more friendly people on their councils, they can continue to take away money. They can continue to scale back funds from the municipalities without having push-back, as they’ve seen from many municipalities across the province up to this point. This government most definitely has a vested interest in trying to push certain people to the polls, and this is one way that they can do that, so that’s concerning. Are they going to put the responsibility of the costs on those very municipalities that they’re trying to influence the elections of? Very concerning.

Now, once again, when we talk about the logistics of referendums and what we see in amendments to section 8 and how voters will be able to take part in these potentially very important referendums if they’re not able to be there for voting day, I know that this is something that has come up in past discussions, and I continue to wait for an answer, as our caucus continues to wait for several answers on the changes to the Referendum Act in this legislation.

While there are many changes to acts in this legislation – and I’ve only had the time to dissect some of the Referendum Act that is being proposed in this – we are still waiting to see what happens from the changes in Bill 26, Bill 27, and Bill 29. We continue to wait for any kind of proof that this government has consulted with municipalities, who are very concerned with the changes that have been put forward.

Now, just quickly, while I have time, I think that some of my colleagues have made some very important points around the changes to the Police Act and the number of communities that are going to be impacted by the changes proposed here. When we look at the population of the treaties across our province – we look at Treaty 8, 21,800; Treaty 6, 22,000; Treaty 7, nearly 16,000 – these are large populations of people that are going to be impacted by this legislation. I do also want to acknowledge that these communities do want to see self-determination, and I support them in that. But we have questions about how that funding agreement is going to be modelled.

We see this government talking about changes, you know, floating trial balloons about bringing in our own provincial police force, with very little actual evidence that that is the right thing to

do, very little consultation on that piece. At the same time, this government is scaling back funding for police services across our province.

While I appreciate that primarily the communities that will be affected by the changes to the Police Act in this legislation are supported by federal dollars, I do also have to question how that relationship with the federal government will change, because we often see, whether it be from a federal level or a provincial level, that when there are changes to how funding or operations take place in these communities, it becomes a nightmare in many instances, with levels of government saying: no; we’re going to change this, and we’re actually not going to support you at the same levels as we did before. They take it as an opportunity to download costs onto these communities, just as this UCP government did when they proposed changes to rural policing. They said that it was going to be a good idea, but, you know, the time came, and it really meant a scaling back of funds to these municipalities, these town councils, and these communities.

We’ve gotten quite used to the UCP saying one thing, that it’s going to affect communities one way, but the actions being completely different than what was proposed in the first place, and it’s very unfortunate and frustrating, I know, for these communities, who feel that they’re part of a consultation, potentially, in the first place, do their best to believe that there’s goodwill . . .

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Madu: I adjourn debate on this matter, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Pardon me?

Mr. Schow: Adjourn.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, you can’t adjourn under 29(2)(a), and he’s already spoken to the bill.

Mr. Schow: That’s what I’m getting at. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

Is someone trying to adjourn the debate? The hon. the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker, or to adjourn?

The Speaker: No; 29(2)(a) has now passed.

Ms Issik: Okay. Just checking.

The Speaker: We’re on the main bill.

Ms Issik: I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 40 Forests (Growing Alberta’s Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020

[Debate adjourned October 27: Member Ceci speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in debate on Bill 40? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is on his feet.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today in this Chamber to speak to a very important and critical element of my critic portfolio in this House, being the critic for Agriculture and Forestry. I speak at a time when forestry, I would think, if indeed the minister is doing his job effectively, would be really readying and positioning itself to take very much a leading role in this province's economy in a way that it never has before. Yet what we see in Bill 40, much championed by the current Minister of Agriculture and Forestry as a modernization of the Forests Act, with the minister saying that it hasn't been changed very much in the last 50 years – we would have expected something along the lines of a grandiose package, with a lot of vision attached to it and a lot more depth than this piece of legislation had.

8:30

I did actually consult the Blues this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and reviewed some of the comments by the minister responsible. Indeed, he claims that after months working with the forestry sector and months of consultation, this is what they came up with, a 50-year document in the making to modernize our Forests Act and position the forest industry to face the new challenges we face and the long-term future where this industry should be taking a much more leading role in our economy than it has in the past. It has an opportunity to do so. That opportunity is before us, yet I see a glaring failure on the part of this minister once again to really take the bull by the horns and seize the opportunity to push forward an industry that is one that has always seen fit to be stewards of the land as well as major seekers of efficiency while they, of course, try to make a profit in pursuing the extraction of our renewable resources, our forests.

Our forests do produce about one-third of the royalties that we're expected to get from Alberta's oil and gas resource sector in current years. Of course, the minister mentioned this in his comments today. All the more important, Mr. Speaker, to then rectify what the minister has now put forward as, I say, a very thin bowl of gruel compared to what he really could have come up with if he was really serious about fully modernizing this Forests Act and putting forestry in the position that it should occupy in this province's economy. Now, after months of consulting with industry leaders, the consensus that I've received so far from speaking with people in the Alberta Forest Products Association is that what they've actually put forward doesn't meet with a lot of opposition from the forestry industry other than one particular company that seems to not want to have anything to do with change, period. However, the consultation that was done by this minister and his department stops there.

Now, we often are not always as aware in our everyday lives as we should be, Mr. Speaker, as Albertans, who for the most part occupy the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, larger centres. The northern one-third of our province is quite often out of sight, out of mind. But, of course, that northern one-third as well as the foothills area of our province is where our forests lie. And what we find when we take a look at the resource that's there and the 40,000-plus people that work in that industry is that it's a resource that has a long trajectory in terms of stewardship. As I mentioned earlier in my comments, the industry itself has a pretty proud history in recent times of being a good steward of that resource. There are ongoing issues, of course, with respect to environmental concerns, but by and large the Alberta Forest Products Association, as a representative organization of the industry, has taken upon itself a long-term view of stewardship for the land.

But there is another group, Mr. Speaker, in this province that has an even longer view, and they take a seventh-generation view of stewardship of the land. They are a group that has been in this

province, occupying the land for around 15,000 years. I speak of course to the indigenous population in Alberta, who live in many of the areas that are forested by our boreal forest. I'm looking at the minister's notes and speech from this afternoon. I looked at our conversation that I had with the officials from the forestry department. Not once have I seen any reference to consultation with indigenous populations in the province regarding this 50-year multitudinous amount of change, according to the minister, Forests Act. In other words, they consulted with industry, but once again this government has forgotten to consult with the indigenous population.

I took it upon myself to actually verify that, Mr. Speaker, and this afternoon I was invited to join by video conference a meeting of Treaty 8 First Nations chiefs. Indeed, I verified that not one of them had been consulted. In fact, they didn't really know about Bill 40 and the act. There was no effort. No one reached out to them to find out what their views were on a piece of legislation that directly affects lands that they have traditionally hunted upon and occupied, which in many cases are adjacent to their own treaty lands.

I was just as shocked as they were to learn this when this government supposedly prides itself on involving First Nations, especially with respect to economic activity and employment amongst First Nations. Here I thought was a golden opportunity for this government to act upon those motives and bring into the discussion, in a very inclusive way early on in the process during these months and months of consultations that the minister was reportedly involving himself in to come up with the best plan after 50 years to modernize this piece of legislation – not once, Mr. Speaker, did they see fit to call upon the indigenous people of this province to come and tell them what their thoughts were with respect to this important piece of legislation that affected lands adjacent to theirs and lands upon which they depend for their hunting and fishing rights and access for other purposes.

There have been changes, significant changes in this legislation, Mr. Speaker, which directly affect the potential relationship between First Nations and the government in terms of their interaction with the forestry sector. For example, one particular piece of the legislation, which I think is one of the major components of it, major changes, is actually the reversion back to something that was in place some time ago, according to some of the First Nations people I spoke to today, and that is the change in time frame from five years to 10 years as the duration of forestry management agreements. The minister spoke this afternoon in saying that this would be a way of giving flexibility to the industry and allowing them to harvest in a way that gave them the ability to adapt to changing conditions, whether it be fire or pine beetles. But that extra five years, changing the agreements from five years to 10 years, is actually going backwards.

Mr. Speaker, I'm told that the agreements used to actually be 20-year agreements and that they had been whittled down over time and negotiations at the behest of First Nations people down to the five-year period, which was a much easier pill to swallow for those landowners and those individuals who were affected by these agreements. They then didn't have to suffer for 10 years as a locked-in period with certain provisions and abilities of the forestry companies to act in a longer period of time.

8:40

This five-year period was something that was worked upon and eventually obtained. Now, First Nations leaders that I spoke with this afternoon are disappointed to see that we're going the other direction and extending this period of time to 10 years. That, Mr. Speaker, is something that possibly could've been avoided had there been consultation with our First Nations leaders regarding this

piece of legislation. I think it's a serious flaw in this process, and it confounds me as to why, once again, this government has failed to seriously adopt its responsibility to inclusively engage First Nations people in a way that matters. We have a government that on one hand doles out the backing of \$10 billion in loan guarantees to First Nations people and organizations, as long as they engage in the investment in oil and gas resource activities, once again, rather patronizingly dictating to First Nations how they must invest. If they invest in a way that suits the government, then there's some money to do that.

Mr. Speaker, in a renewable resource sector the government is certainly not seeing fit to be inclusive here. The First Nations, once again, were left out of the whole process and not even consulted. It's shameful. It's really hard to imagine. I was really in disbelief that the government failed to come forward with a standardized policy of going ahead and inviting First Nations individuals and leadership to come in and comment and bring their knowledge of the relationship between themselves and forestry companies and the provincial government over the years to the table, to make these changes to a bill that hasn't been really amended at all in about 50 years.

Let's take this opportunity to actually do something worth while with it instead of frittering it on what I'd describe as a rather thin-gruel piece of legislation that the minister has come up with. I mean, they've gone ahead and made some significant changes in terms of the time frame that a forest management agreement will be in place. A permit to cut will be in place from five to 10 years. They doubled that, and they're talking about doing some other things such as creating a transparency provision to publish, very widely and openly, the methods by which the fees and dues are calculated so that in the event of a future softwood lumber dispute with the United States, which, as we all know, are recurring dilemmas on a regular basis – they claim, as the officials that I spoke with from the department claim and also the minister in his own remarks today claims, it would make softwood lumber disputes more easily defensible.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as the minister stated in the House earlier this afternoon, the numbers were no state secret even before this. They were handily available, especially for those officials in the United States who might have wanted to investigate them to bring them to the table if they were looking to make a claim in a softwood lumber dispute and an international trade agreement. Good luck with attempting to dissuade U.S. lumber interests from going ahead in inventing another false claim against us just because the numbers are published.

I've got lots more to say.

The Speaker: Well, I'm sure you'll have lots more opportunity.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. Sounds like he has a lot more to say.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some debate so far, and I'm really proud to be able to stand up and speak to this very important bill. As was mentioned, the last substantial update of the Forests Act was actually in 1971, and, as everybody in this Chamber knows, the landscape of Alberta has incredibly shifted a lot since that time. Alberta has more forested area than Japan or Germany, totalling more than 60 per cent of the province, or 87 million acres total across the province of Alberta. Alberta's forest industry is a multibillion-dollar industry that employs tens of thousands of individuals, but not many people know that here in the province. It's kind of a forgotten industry in a lot of ways. They

think of agriculture or, of course, our energy sector, but they don't know that in many parts of our province the forest sector is the primary employer. I'll say it again. The forest industry is a multibillion-dollar industry, contributing \$2 billion to the provincial GDP. It sustains – and I think this is an incredible number – 19,500 direct, well-paying jobs across the entire province of Alberta.

By updating the Forests Act, we are transitioning to be more modern and resilient. This work is to better aid the forest sector while maintaining Alberta's commitment to sustainable forestry practices, and I think we should be really proud of our sustainable practices and what we have here in Alberta. I'll say it again. We've said it for the energy sector over and over again that we are the most environmental and ethical producers. I think we can say the same for our forestry industry.

Reviewing the Forests Act also helps us maintain two of our important platform commitments: reducing red tape, which is always one of the principle concerns with every employer, and the forest jobs guarantee. Red tape reduction and the forest jobs guarantee were platform commitments that necessitated this review. A major focus in this review was to reduce this red tape, increase administrative efficiency, and ease some of the regulatory burdens that always pass on additional costs to employers across the province.

Alberta has a competitive forest sector, and the importance of maintaining that cannot be understated. The role that the forestry sector plays in supporting rural communities throughout the decades and into the future helps us maintain the economic success of the province. I think it's important to talk about. I grew up in a small town, Cochrane, just west of Calgary, and I no longer live there. I grew up north of there on highway 22 on a small farm, so I used to see a lot of the logging trucks go back and forth.

I think it's important to talk about the storied longevity of a lot of these industries across our province. I speak a lot: Spray Lake Sawmills is the principle reason I think Cochrane is there, to be honest, and why it's survived as a town and how many people it employed. It was established in 1943, and it moved to Cochrane in 1969. I think this speaks a lot to the importance and the sustainability. These are quality jobs, quality jobs that stay in these small towns, and they're important. Like I mentioned, these are well-paying jobs. Not only the rural regions; 8 per cent of indigenous people are employed by this same forestry sector, making it the highest proportion of indigenous workers employed in any major economic sector. Updating this legislation for the first time in nearly 40 years means that it will attract more investment and create more jobs while ensuring that the industry remains sustainable for the long term.

While Alberta has the fastest growing lumber exports of any province, these changes also address some of the complaints of the U.S. in the softwood lumber disputes, which means that we may be able to increase shipments to them in the future. By resolving trade disputes with the U.S., we may be able to open doors to our largest trading partner once again. We will be able to enhance Alberta's position with the softwood lumber trade dispute. This regulation will enable common, standard clauses to apply across all forest management agreements and save industry and government time and resources while negotiating these agreements. Forest management agreements are the long-term renewable contracts that give companies certain rights to establish grow harvests and remove Crown timber in exchange for various responsibilities such as forest management, planning, and creation of forest inventory. I think it's great that we finally enshrine this. I mean, we talk about transparency. This will give that security and transparency and add to what we had. It builds on that.

8:50

The agreement holders take on significant responsibility and accountability for forest management planning, consistent with the government of Alberta's commitment to sustainable resource development. In addition, forest management agreement holders are required to provide an opportunity for public consultation during the development of a forest management plan for the area. At this point in time there are 20 FMAs in Alberta, each taking on average one year roughly to negotiate. However, close to 75 per cent of these clauses remain the same in all of these. So we talk about this. This is why we're making these changes. Valuable time and energy are wasted in disclosing these essentially nonnegotiable elements. By legislating the FMA requirements and legislation, this supports Alberta's position in the softwood lumber trade dispute by documenting – and I think this is the critical piece that the member opposite was talking to, but this is incredibly important – in legislation obligations that FMA holders must meet. Now it is in legislation. That is critically important. That is a critical piece to this. This is a huge step forward in reducing red tape within one of our core sectors.

The other way that we are reducing red tape is by updating the administrative technology and policy applications to align with the current operational practices. When the Forests Act was last updated, the Internet was barely a concept and computers took up entire rooms. Now we wear them on our wrists, and we carry them around in our pockets every single day. Currently rules, directives, codes, standards, and guidelines can be adopted or incorporated into regulation. With these changes manuals can also be adopted and incorporated into regulation.

These proposed changes were done with extensive consultation from 41 different companies in Alberta from February to August of last year. That's what we do, Mr. Speaker. That's what we do as our government here. We consult with industry, and we make the changes that are needed, the ones that have common sense embedded into them, not like the members opposite, who rammed through ideological changes that frustrated business owners across the province. That's why they're sitting over there right now. The forest industry is incredibly supportive of these proposed changes, and I'm proud to stand with them and speak in support of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, standing order – the hon. Member for Highwood, I'm not sure; perhaps there was some discussion about maybe you moving a motion to adjourn debate. I don't know that that's the case, but given the motions from the Deputy Government House Leader perhaps that was the case.

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 35
Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation)
Amendment Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate October 26: Mr. Jason Nixon]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has 13 minutes remaining.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to second reading of Bill 35, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020.

Creating jobs and driving innovation: that is debatable but is part of the title. I will have several remarks. As far as what's included in this bill and if it will actually achieve what the government claims it will, if history is a lesson for us to pay attention to, I'll remind all members of this Chamber that immediately upon being elected to government, the new government introduced a corporate tax reduction, claiming that it would create hundreds of thousands of jobs. It would attract companies to Alberta. In fact, I believe the Premier even said that the big banks will be moving to Calgary. They'd be . . .

An Hon. Member: Crazy not to.

Mr. Bilous: They'd be crazy not to. I wanted to use a different word, but I think "crazy" is . . .

Mr. Nielsen: Irresponsible.

Mr. Bilous: Or irresponsible – thank you from my caucus – along those lines. They'd be irresponsible, they'd be crazy, they'd be foolish not to come to Alberta because the Premier and this UCP government believe that the corporate tax rate is the silver bullet to save the economy. That's the only tool that businesses need regardless of whether they're a start-up, a scale-up, or a multinational.

Mr. Speaker, I know you're dying to ask: well, how many companies, how many banks did come to Alberta from the original corporate tax reduction? Guess what? Insert crickets here. We have not had a single bank. In fact, I asked members opposite in question period in the spring, borderline summer, that exact question of how many of the banks have acted on this because the Premier was convinced that this corporate tax reduction would be the incentive or the carrot needed to drive the relocation of banks. But you know what? Not a single one has moved to Alberta, which in and of itself should be evident to members opposite that this policy failed to deliver what the Premier promised.

I can tell you as well, Mr. Speaker, that last year – this was pre-COVID, after the corporate tax reduction was announced – 50,000 jobs were lost under this UCP government. Now, we all know that they love to cry about the past government and they've yet to take responsibility for their own actions and the fact that they've been governing now for roughly 18 months, a year and a half, yet they still will not own up to their own failed policies. They'll try to rewrite history and point to the past. The reality is that when the government is asked to point to a single job created from the corporate tax reduction, they are unable to provide a single example.

Now, I've said this in the House in the past, and I'll say it again. At some point, obviously, there will be jobs created. Now, the government will jump to their feet and claim it was because of the corporate tax reduction, to which we will have a vigorous debate about whether that actually had one iota of a difference in creating a job or not, but we'll leave that for another day. The point is that the government, one of its first actions was to engage in a race to the bottom.

We have a number of examples of U.S. states that have reduced their corporate taxes to a very, very low sum and, in fact, because of it they'd claimed that it would help the job creators to create more jobs. They'd be incentivized with this trickle-down economics. Everybody would win. What happened in certain states is that they were on the brink of collapsing because they had no income whatsoever to pay for things like policing, roads, sidewalks, amenities that citizens demand and, quite frankly, amenities that any multinational would expect if they were planning to set up shop in another jurisdiction. They are not about to relocate to a

jurisdiction because their corporate tax rate is so low yet the municipality or the state cannot afford to adequately fund education, to adequately fund and pave streets or clear snow. All of those things, in fact, cost money and inhibit business.

You know, the other day I gave an example of how attractive provinces like Alberta are due to the fact that we have a public health care system. I know members opposite – well, I mean, I'm happy to provide them with some documents that will illustrate the fact that U.S. companies spend significant dollars paying the employer share of the employee health benefits, billions of dollars, hundreds of billions of dollars, in fact. So that makes Alberta more competitive. That is a competitive advantage.

9:00

The folks opposite talk about the Alberta advantage. Well, I think they missed what the actual Alberta advantage is. Having a world-class public education system, one where countries and states and jurisdictions all over the world ask to use the Alberta curriculum although under this government they're going to say: no, thanks; we'll take a curriculum that's written, you know, in the 21st century, for today, not a curriculum that takes us backwards to 1950.

I'm going off track a little bit here, Mr. Speaker. However, it's critical that the government recognize that to date this corporate tax reduction has not delivered what, in fact, this government was elected on. I know that some members opposite are still feeling quite smug about the election in 2019, but I encourage them to get out and talk to Albertans to see how impressed they are with their plan to create jobs and the fact that we've got an economy that's continuing to shrink. In fact, last year, pre-COVID, 50,000 jobs were lost. Right now there are just over 300,000 Albertans looking for work.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans are rightfully frustrated with this government, that promised jobs, that promised action to help turn around the economy, and the only solution that they've come up with is to give away \$4.7 billion on a corporate tax giveaway, where we have several examples of companies who have said: hey, thank you very much; we're going to take this savings, whether it's \$2 million, \$10 million, or Husky's \$300 million, and we're going to go invest it in other provinces that have a higher tax rate. So how can the government claim that this is the be-all, end-all that will attract companies from everywhere when, in fact, it hasn't?

You know what? We know the answer to that. It's because companies look at much more than just the taxes that they have to pay. Every business owner and entrepreneur knows that the most important assets they have are the people that they hire, the talent that they have in their company. I will argue that Alberta has an incredible amount of talent. But talent needs to be invested in, so making massive cuts to postsecondary, making cuts to our public education system and cuts to our health care system, laying off thousands of workers amidst a pandemic, at the same time picking fights with doctors – if you're scratching your head, Mr. Speaker, so is everyone across this country. In fact, people around the world are saying, "You know, for a jurisdiction that's trying to claim that they have all of these assets" – I mean, we had them, but this current government is whittling them away.

Now, I wish that this government would bring forward a bill that would actually support our innovation system and actually support job creators to create jobs. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, again that when the UCP formed government, one of the first things they did was eliminate every single one of the job-creating programs that were brought in under the former NDP government. Now, no matter how many times I try to explain to my colleagues opposite that these

weren't NDP ideas – they're not ideas that belong to a political party. A tax credit: no political party has ownership over that idea. In fact, it's funny, and industry finds it funny and frustrating that the current government claims that it was an NDP idea, when they say: "No, it wasn't. It was our idea. It came from industry. They happened to be government and actually listened to industry and listened to the job creators."

You know, we asked them: "What role can government play?" I can tell you first and foremost that every single one of them said, "There is a role for government to play in creating the right conditions." If you think there isn't – if the government under Peter Lougheed and his generation did not make substantial investments in the oil sands and in the energy sector, Alberta would never have had the prosperity that it has. You don't have to take my word for it. Go talk to some of the original CEOs. In fact, I was talking to a stakeholder the other day, and I was referencing the original CEO of Suncor, and he said: oh, no; call up the current CEO of Suncor, and he'll be the first to admit that if government hadn't made strategic investments, Alberta's oil sector, oil sands would have never taken off the way it did. There is, in fact, a role for government.

Our tax credit programs were levelling the playing field. You know, these guys on the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker, claim that it's about picking winners and losers. You know what? If the government claims that there is no role, then – guess what? – Alberta will be a loser because B.C. has tax credits. Ontario and Quebec have tax credits. Guess what's happening to our talent and our companies? They're moving to these other jurisdictions. What we did was that we listened to industry and implemented programs that would level the playing field, and they were working. It floors me that members will stand up and say: oh, well, it only helped X hundreds of companies or X thousands of workers.

You know what? First of all, as the other side is learning real quick, diversification is not a light switch. We all wish that it was, but it's not. It takes strategic investments, and it takes time. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that where Alberta would be today if those tax credits weren't cancelled and there wasn't an 18-month – now it's more like a 23-month – void: we would be in a much better position. We would have significantly more dollars attracted to the province, invested. We would have supported more companies. More would have stayed here. More would have come here. We've heard example after example of companies that said: "You know what? The current Alberta government made it very clear that we're not welcome in the province of Alberta."

Now, I will say, Mr. Speaker, that recently the government has changed its tune a little, where now they are talking about diversification – they've taken out billboards on highway 2 and other parts of the province; it's in most ministers' speeches – yet when we look at where the rubber hits the road, it is still a fraction of the investment required to become a global hub for talent and investment. I know that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation talks a great game. He really does. However, when you look at the dollar amounts in what they have invested, they're a fraction compared to what was committed or invested under the NDP government.

This government recently announced a few million dollars of new money for the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. I support that. However, when you look at the \$150 million that was cut from their budgets, giving them back \$3 million or \$4 million is not new money. It's not a new investment. You have to repay the money that you cut and took and then add new money, and that's a new investment. Until it is repaid or paid back, what you still have is a massive cut to institutions like our postsecondaries.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if you'd like to add a brief question or comment. The Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very interesting for us on this side of the aisle to sit down and listen to the comment with respect to Bill 35 made by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on what it will take to rebuild our economy and create jobs and opportunities for the people of this province.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to clarify that although facts and data don't mean anything to members opposite, they continue to peddle this misinformation about the job-creation tax cut, suggesting that that was a \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway despite the fact that every reputable economist out there has confirmed that that is not true. But, I mean, for the NDP that doesn't mean anything. For them it's good politics. It's good for fundraising even if it's not grounded in reality or facts. So to viewers out there and to our citizens across our province – and I know that the people of Alberta, you know, are seeing the NDP for what they are. They can continue to peddle this misinformation for all they care, but I can guarantee them that the people of Alberta understand that that is absolute misinformation.

You know, we inherited an economy that was nearly destroyed by the NDP. They talk about investment, but they had four years to prove to every Albertan that they understood what it means to build a functional economy, and for four years they failed. They like to talk about tax credits, investment in this and that, but for four years under their watch the blunt truth is that there were more than 178,000 Albertans that were out of work. The unemployment rate in this particular province started to skyrocket under the Alberta NDP.

They talk about Peter Lougheed. Yes, Peter Lougheed made a historic investment in the oil and gas sector, the same sector that the NDP tried as hard as they can to destroy in the last four years that they had the opportunity to govern this province. And they would want the people of Alberta to believe that they are pro energy and gas. You know, there is no truth whatsoever to those allegations, but the people of Alberta understand that, and that was why they were fired in 2019, because their words do not match their actions. They worked with the federal Liberal government to undermine Alberta's oil and gas sector, appointed Tzeporah Berman, that advocated for the elimination of the oil sands. The members opposite campaigned against pipelines, every single pipeline. They attended public protests with the radical left, that was bent on land-locking Alberta's oil and gas sector.

Mr. Speaker, imagine: at a time like this, where businesses are suffering, the only solution that the NDP has is to impose more taxes on already suffering businesses. That is the beginning and the end of their tax policy. You know, businesses are already struggling, and what they would want us to do is impose more corporate taxes, more income taxes on businesses that are already struggling. They talk about businesses leaving our province, shutting down. It is true. Businesses are shutting down as a consequence of the policies pursued by the NDP from 2015 to 2019, that we are now trying so hard to undo, all of those policies. On this side of the aisle we are working so hard to rebuild our economy.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, there is no time remaining on 29(2)(a).

Anyone else wishing to join in debate on Bill 35? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to take the opportunity to express my support for this significant bill for our province's economy, Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020. I would like to commend the minister for having this bill in place as our economy needs these necessary tools and initiatives to bolster our province. Bill 35 is an important piece of legislation that will help boost the Alberta economy's recovery and secure a stable and prosperous economic future.

Mr. Speaker, with so many challenges that businesses are facing right now, one way the government can assist is by fostering a business climate that will create jobs, spur investment, and support innovation and diversification. With the COVID-induced economic downturn, low oil prices, declines in tax revenue, and high unemployment, Alberta needs this business investment now more than ever. Showcasing Alberta as the destination of choice of businesses looking to set up shop will bring economic diversification and stability to our province.

Alberta's recovery plan builds on our strength with timely, targeted investments and bold policy reforms that will create tens of thousands of jobs and make Alberta more competitive in the long term. The Alberta government is confident that as the economy recovers and the business world continues to move again, Alberta's competitive business environment will put it in the best possible position to lead the recovery.

Business taxes were hiked by 20 per cent. The minimum wage was increased by almost 50 per cent in a very short amount of time. A huge amount of red tape and regulations were implemented to restrict the economic growth in Alberta.

Alberta's government is accelerating the job-creation tax cut a year and a half ahead of schedule. Alberta's corporate tax rate is 8 per cent, 30 per cent lower than the previous tax rate. The fiscal impact of the job-creation tax cut is now expected to be significantly less given the profound impact of COVID-19 and lower oil prices on Alberta's economy. Based on the first-quarter update, the fiscal impact of the job-creation tax cut is estimated to be \$1 billion to \$1.3 billion over the next four years. The tax initiatives are not a giveaway or a handout but simply and only for the purpose of helping all businesses in Alberta that have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Alberta small and medium-sized businesses have especially been affected and need financial support to overcome this unprecedented situation. In the past month, Mr. Speaker, I have visited different businesses in Calgary-East: convenience stores, fast-food restaurants, gas stations, auto repair shops, to name a few. I talked with the owners and staff, and almost all of them are struggling to cope with the current conditions. Some have been operating with a lower number of staff and fewer hours. Nevertheless, they were delighted to know about our job-creation tax cut and the Alberta recovery plan.

As I have previously mentioned in this Chamber, I used to be a small-business owner in Calgary-East before becoming a member of this Legislature, and being such, I understand their position, which is for the government to find ways to lessen the instability they are under now. With the new development, it will reduce their burden. This is the time to accelerate the process and ensure that businesses in Alberta are being supported by their government. This considers the quicker rate cut and the expected positive impacts on investments, jobs, and other government revenue through 2022-2023.

As part of Alberta's recovery plan the government has introduced the innovation employment grant, IEG. Mr. Speaker, this program will encourage economic growth by supporting small and medium-sized businesses that invest in research and development. This

program is designed to join together with the job-creation tax cut, and it will be more effective at attracting and encouraging growth in start-ups. As companies grow and increase their research and development spending, they will benefit from the IEG. This new initiative will boost investment and support development in Alberta's technology and innovation sector. The program is part of Alberta's technology and innovation approach, which includes immediate and long-term actions that will help support investment, economic growth, and good jobs in the province's technology sector. The grants are worth up to 20 per cent of qualifying research and development expenditures. It will use a small approach that is unique within Canada to provide more support to companies that increase their research and development spending.

9:20

The IEG is not a replacement of previous tax credits but is available to all small and medium-sized firms that invest in research and development in Alberta regardless of their industry. The IEG and the job-creation tax cut are strong initiatives for innovative, high-growth companies to locate and invest in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the government will invest an estimated \$60 million to \$70 million in 2021 through the innovation employment grant, that will be available for research and development carried out in Alberta on or after January 1, 2021. Unlike the previous scientific research and development incentive, the IEG focuses on small and medium-sized firms and is designed to provide greater rewards to companies.

Again, the IEG is designed to support small and medium-sized companies in the early stages of their development, whether or not there is any income. Larger businesses would benefit from the job-creation tax cut, so they will not receive the innovation employment grant. As these companies begin to commercialize and grow, they will gradually phase out of the IEG program and begin to benefit from the tax cut.

The innovation employment grant is a significant improvement on Alberta's previous scientific research and development tax credit. Start-ups that increase the amount they spend on research and development in Alberta will receive more support from the IEG than they would from similar programs in other provinces. Most Canadian provinces do support innovation through tax credit programs that are similar to Alberta's previous scientific research and development tax credit. The IEG is designed to support all research and development spending by small and medium-sized firms in Alberta and provide extra initiative for companies that increase their investment in research and development.

Some jurisdictions in Canada and around the world already have arm's-length agencies in place focused on the pursuit of new investment opportunities and promoting their jurisdictions' interests. The provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, and Saskatchewan have agencies with a mandate to lead and co-ordinate activities for attracting investment to their jurisdictions. Alberta's 20 per cent incremental grant is significantly more generous than the research and development tax credits offered by British Columbia and Ontario.

For example, a new start-up company investing \$250,000 in research and development in Alberta will receive \$50,000 in its first year. For the same investment, the company will receive \$28,050 through Ontario's program and \$25,000 through B.C.'s program. A firm that maintains this level of eligible research and development spending in Alberta will receive an 8 per cent base grant on all eligible yearly spending. This incremental approach is unique in Canada and will make Alberta a more attractive investment destination for growing companies in the technology and innovation sector.

As Albertans we already know that our province is an incredible place to live, work, and start a business. With the acceleration of our job-creation tax cut, Alberta will have one of the lowest business taxes in North America. This, combined with our young and highly dedicated workforce, will make Alberta a global hot spot for job creation. All of these industries have and will continue to play crucial roles in supporting the economic well-being of our province as well as the entire country.

Mr. Speaker, businesses investing in Alberta is what turned us from a sparsely populated and mostly agricultural society into the economic powerhouse of Confederation. Let me end by saying that there is no better place to invest and do business than Alberta, and we need to make sure investors know it. These companies are not only the backbone of our province's economy, but they also play a crucial role in supporting Canada as a whole.

Again, I applaud the minister for the hard work that has been put into this bill. This is an amazing job in pursuit of our economic recovery. With this Bill 35, the Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, our government is continuing to repair the damage done previously and restore the Alberta advantage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Calgary-East. The hon. the Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, I do, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the opportunity to rise, and thank you very much to the hon. Member for Calgary-East for his excellent comments today. I was listening with interest to the debate this evening, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you have been as well, particularly to some of the comments from the member as well as earlier from the member of the Official Opposition from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I believe, if I have his constituency right. I do hope I do have it right. I saw a lot of contrast between what the Member for Calgary-East and the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview said, who spent a lot of time talking about what my constituents might think.

Mr. Speaker, I know you saw me indicate to him across the aisle – and I want to officially do it on the record in *Hansard* – that if he'd like to come and see what my constituents think, I invite him. He's got an open invitation any time he wants. Pick any town you want in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and come by. I mean, Minister Schweitzer always invites them and offers to actually get a bus to come and pick up the Official Opposition so they can come down and . . .

The Speaker: The use of names for any reason would be inappropriate.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Oh. Right. Of course. I should not have used the name at all, Mr. Speaker, so I will withdraw his name and say that the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, the minister of jobs and the economy, often invites them to come to our constituencies, even offering to take a bus.

I will note that not once have I actually seen the NDP or any one of their members come to Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre in the last six years. Not once except for – I have to give her credit for it. The former Minister of Health and the now deputy Leader of the Official Opposition did come and tour the Rocky Mountain House hospital at my request. It took a couple of years, but she did come. In fact, I believe she was the only Health minister that ever toured the town of Rocky Mountain House, so she does deserve credit for that.

But, certainly, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview never, even when he was a minister, came to that portion of west-central Alberta, and I am inviting him now that he's in the opposition. I will say, Mr. Speaker, in fact, that I will hold a town hall in his honour in any one of those towns if he's willing to take the stage with me and find out what the people of west-central Alberta think about the NDP's policies about continuing to tax our citizens.

If he for any reason, Mr. Speaker, thinks that rural Alberta has forgiven the NDP, he will find out very, very quickly, when he arrives at that town hall, that that's not the case. Now, don't get me wrong. I know you're from just up the road, inside Olds. You know that the great people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre will be nice in welcoming him to our community. In fact, he'd probably be surprised at how nice they would be to him. But they will make it clear that the policies that the socialist opposition had when they were a socialist government in this province of jacking up taxes every chance that they got is something that is still rejected by rural Alberta, certainly by the constituents that I have the privilege of representing in this place. So I do hope that he takes me up on the opportunity to do that at some point though, sadly, I suspect he won't.

Mr. Orr: There are no buses there.

Mr. Jason Nixon: We'll send a truck to pick him up. We definitely don't have any buses; you're right. Of course, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was part of a government that once told all of my constituents to take a bus or to walk as the answer to the carbon tax, also indicating to me that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has never been to Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, because, one, we don't have buses, and two, we'd have to walk an awful long way.

So if the Official Opposition thinks that the answer to the world's problems is continuing to jack the tax rates of my constituents, they are fundamentally wrong. Not only that, but they have completely and utterly misjudged, certainly, where the majority of Albertans are and certainly well beyond the majority of the people in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I would welcome the opportunity for the member to come and visit any time, and I'm very sure that my neighbours will express that to him and will also probably educate him a little bit on what his tax policies did, things like the carbon tax, when he was in government.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that creating a tax environment inside this province to be able to attract investment back to this province is exactly what needs to happen right now. I commend the Minister of Finance for continuing down this track to get Alberta back on track. When the NDP government were in power, they chased away billions of dollars of investment, cost tens of thousands of jobs, because the reality is that they were stuck with their socialist policies. But don't worry. Albertans fired them, and there will be no more socialists in government in this province.

9:30

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is next.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise tonight to speak to Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I'm so proud of the work that the members on this side of the House are doing when it comes to listening to Albertans and

supporting Albertans where they're at and listening to what Albertans are asking for. I can tell you very clearly, Mr. Speaker, that they're asking for a government that has their back. They're asking for a government that isn't going to give away \$4.7 billion to already-profitable corporations because we know that that doesn't work. We've seen it over the last 18 months. There have been zero new jobs created out of that. I find it funny that this act is called "driving innovation" when what we've seen over the last 18 months with the UCP in government is that they're driving doctors away. They're driving professionals away. They're driving innovators away. They're driving tech away. They're driving artists away. For them to say that they're driving innovation, I find it quite rich that that's part of this when what they are actually driving is the fleeing of talent from Alberta.

We've seen incredible attacks on our health care profession, Mr. Speaker. Right now we're in the middle of a global pandemic. The whole world is struggling. The whole world is looking to our health care professionals as our heroes. They're the ones who get up day in, day out, and they're faced with this pandemic every single day. What does this government do? They fire health care workers. They refuse to listen to doctors. There were pleas from patients, from families that are high risk, that are vulnerable, to listen to doctors, to at least just come to the table and talk to them. That's not happening. This is the type of government that is saying that they're going to sit here, they're going to introduce this tax statute, they're going to create jobs, drive innovation when that's not what we're seeing.

I know through my work as the culture critic that I've had a lot of opportunities to meet with artists all across the province of Alberta. We know that arts and culture in the province is a major economic driver. We know that the industry itself contributed \$5.3 billion to Alberta's economy according to the Alberta federation for the arts in their 2017-18 annual report. Mr. Speaker, it employs nearly 60,000 workers. This is an industry that has been attacked by this government. They are an industry that has come to the government time and time again pleading to have a voice, pleading to have a seat at the table. This is pre-pandemic. This is something that – we know they're struggling. Prior to the pandemic the UCP cut so much money out of the culture sector. They cut money from community programs. They cut money from the arts. They cut money from children's arts programs.

We know that the arts is a driving economic factor in the province of Alberta. Not only does it drive the economy, Mr. Speaker; it's something that when people are looking at bringing their business to the province, they want to see that there's a thriving arts community. When people talk about, "What does this province offer?" there are so many amazing festivals that are run throughout this province. We have some of the most beautiful museums. We have some of the most beautiful travel and tourism opportunities here in the province. We have Banff. We have Kananaskis. We have beautiful prairies. Unfortunately, this government doesn't see those things as a priority. They're looking at a tax statute to drive people to come to the province. Well, it's more than that. This side of the House understands that. It's about people.

I've been working really closely with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to engage our travel and tourism sector, to engage our arts sector, to talk about what they need because there have been incredible cuts. They're not being supported. They're not being listened to. It's something that is very concerning because when you hear from these industries, they're saying: "We're here. We want to help. We have solutions that can revitalize the economy. Just give us a chance to sit at the table."

In May, Mr. Speaker, I hosted an event where we had many different members from industry, from the arts community come

forward and talk about what they need. They asked for the reinvestment of the \$3 million that had been cut from the budget from the arts – sorry. They asked for that reimbursement to be put back. Unfortunately, the pandemic requires more than just that money be reinvested. They need more money being reinvested. They need supports. They need alternatives. So they were coming to the government with alternative strategies.

We know during this pandemic that the average person is sitting at home, and what do they turn to? They turn to the arts. They turn to culture. They're desperate for something to take their mind off what's happening in the world right now. There's so much suffering, and there's so much pain. The reality is that people are at home, and they're looking for ways to entertain themselves, they're looking for ways to express themselves, and the arts are what people are turning to. They're looking at picking up a musical instrument that perhaps they haven't played since high school. I know myself, Mr. Speaker, I used to be a competitive hip hop dancer.

Member Irwin: What? No way.

Ms Goehring: I was.

Mr. Jason Nixon: That's cool.

Ms Goehring: I stopped doing it in 2015 because my schedule changed.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Oh, I still do it.

Ms Goehring: It was something that I really missed. So I went online, and I registered into a hip hop class. It was a way for me to get exercise and to do a passion that I really enjoyed. And I know that, speaking to Albertans, I'm not the only one that's looking to arts and culture and trying to find a way to work on my mental health during this pandemic as well as my physical health during this pandemic.

When the government talks about creating jobs and driving innovation, they're completely ignoring an entire industry that is able and willing to help them. We talk about diversification. It's an industry that already exists here in the province. We have one of the best film industries. We have the greatest crews. We have people from all over the world that look to Alberta, want to come here and do production. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that that's not happening right now. There are so many opportunities that were lost. Film directors are leaving. Film producers are leaving. Our creativity is leaving the province. And I can tell you that once these incredible minds and talent leave the province, they're not coming back.

When we look at the cuts that have been made in postsecondary, we're taking these young, beautiful minds, that could have perhaps chosen Alberta as an opportunity to get their education – we know when students come to a province and they get their education, if it's a thriving province with opportunity, they're going to stay. Unfortunately, we're not even drawing students in because of all the cuts that happened in postsecondary. We're not even drawing those young minds here.

When we talk about innovation and creating jobs, we're not looking at how you do that. They're putting this tax statute forward, and they're saying, you know: it's going to work. Well, we know that their plan isn't working. We know that before the pandemic there were 50,000 jobs lost. When we look at their \$4.7 billion tax break, really, that they gave to already-profitable corporations who didn't take that money and reinvest in the province, they took that money and invested in the United States. They laid off people.

It's not working. We need a new plan. We need to listen to those people that are already here in the province, like the arts industry, like travel and tourism. They have all of these creative ideas on how they can bring people to the province.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about what's important to business when they come to a province. I've talked about the culture component and the arts, and that's something that I know is very important when they're trying to sell a province to employees. They want to know what the culture of the province is. What's the arts scene? What's the theatre like? What can we do for my children, for my spouse to keep them entertained? What can we offer?

9:40

But there are also things like health care. When we're looking at what draws people to a province, they want to see the health care, that they know that their loved ones are going to be taken care of. And right now, when we hear from Albertans, they're not happy. They don't trust this government with their health care. We're looking at a government that is taking these drastic decisions. They're looking at an American-style health care. People are not going to want to bring their business and their employees to a province that is unstable in health care, something that's simple, something that should be an expectation for safety and security, especially during a global pandemic, Mr. Speaker.

I know that another component is education. When you're trying to get your employees to come to a new province, you know, when you're trying to draw investors to come here and set up their business and bring their employees here, those are questions that they're going to have. They're going to want to know the stability of their education system. What education is my child going to get? Well, when we look at a government that stopped the process of the curriculum review that we had under way, because it had been so many years since it had been looked at, and they're attacking things like GSAs, it's not safe for kids to be in this environment. Why would an employee say, "Please, I want to move my family there"? Not only does the employer want to get their business here, but they need their employees to come along and be onboard, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the health care, when you look at education, when you look at the culture, those are not selling features for this province. Looking at their Bill 35, tax statutes, they're not looking at the bigger picture about what it means to be an Albertan, what it means to have a business here, what it means to raise your family here. You want people to come to Alberta and thrive. You want people to come to our province and really feel like they're a part of it and that they made a better decision for their family. They chose a place to live and raise their family. They uprooted from somewhere else to a better place. That is not this province right now. The way that this government has cut so many things – health care, education, supports for AISH, supports for PDD – it's just not a selling feature to these big industries that they're trying to claim are going to be drawn here because of this tax statute.

I know that when I look at my work with the military, they have opportunities to request postings, and I know that over the years, prior to the UCP, when I was the government liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces, Alberta was top of the list for a Canadian Armed Forces member to want to come and relocate their family to. They knew that we had amazing health care. They knew that if they came here, perhaps their special-needs child would have access to specialists, that their special-needs child would have access for people with disabilities. They would have access to AISH as they transitioned from childhood into adulthood. They knew that there was a great education system for their children.

Now, unfortunately, I don't know that that's the case. When I spoke to military families, those were the top three features, right? We had an amazing health care system, we had an amazing education system, and we had supports for the disability community that no other province at that time had. Unfortunately, I don't think that's the case right now. When we see all of the cuts that they've made to the AISH system, to PDD, to our education and health care, those aren't selling features anymore, and this plan through Bill 35 doesn't address any of that. It doesn't address the people component of it, Mr. Speaker. It looks at their plan of their \$4.7 billion tax cut, and I don't believe that they actually are talking to Albertans.

We've heard over and over and we've spoken in this House about concerns that we are hearing, not just from my constituents of Edmonton-Castle Downs; I can tell you that I hear from people from across the entire province with concerns. I know that this is something that they're concerned about. They can't get a hold of their UCP MLA. They can't get a hold of the minister that's responsible for their industry or for whatever sector that they have a concern with, so they come to us, and we're listening. We've created a website that people can come to and express their ideas for our economic recovery. They can go to albertasfuture.ca and give us their input. We're asking people. We continue every day to reach out to our constituents and talk to them, and they give us feedback, and we bring those ideas forward in the House. Mr. Speaker, we bring them through amendments. We bring them through letters to ministers. We bring them through ideas when we're in committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I think the hon. member that jumped up the quickest this time was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You tricked me there for a minute.

The Acting Speaker: I just do also want to clarify. I believe we are under 29(2)(a) on this one, so it's only five minutes, right?

Member Irwin: Hundred per cent. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to start off in response to my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs by praising her for her thoughtful comments. In fact, she gave a really good assessment of why Bill 35 will not move our province forward and will not build the future that our province needs. I appreciated so much her articulation of the importance of the arts. I was quite disheartened to hear the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, a minister of the Crown, in fact, mocking her as she spoke about the importance of the arts and her own background in the arts. I just wanted to get on the record the shameful behaviour we're hearing from members of the government. It says a lot.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: I believe a point of order has been called. The hon. Government House Leader has the floor.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order that puts undue motives on another member. I did not mock the hon. member. Completely inappropriate for the member to be saying that. I know it's a new tactic of the NDP, and that's fine; they can have at 'er. But for the record that is categorically false. In

fact, I said that I wished I could do hip hop dancing. Obviously, it would probably be comical to watch me do that. That's it. That's all that happened there. The hon. member should stop playing fast and loose with the facts.

The Acting Speaker: Do I have anybody – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise because I do think that the member, in her response in 29(2)(a), was giving a very accurate retelling of the behaviour in the Chamber this evening. I echo the concerns that she was sharing in her bill debate. I do not believe that this is a point of order given the accuracy of her statements. I would ask that she be allowed to continue on her 29(2)(a), which I was finding very informative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: All right. At this stage I've heard both sides. I do think that we are perhaps, for whatever reason, starting to move towards a situation where the debate could potentially become less effective, which, of course, is never the goal of this House. At this point I will not find the point of order, but I will caution the member that not only is it possible that you are straying into perhaps imputing false motives, but there could also be something with regard to – I know that the comment was made with regard to mocking, but also calling it shameful could also be then considered perhaps insulting. So all I'm saying is that I do not find a point of order, but I would invite the hon. member to just caution with regard to the comments.

With that, there are three minutes and 57 seconds left under the 29(2)(a).

Debate Continued

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I was saying as well that I very much appreciated the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs' discussion of the importance of the arts and of the importance of supporting our communities, our diverse communities, because what she was getting at was the fact that we as a province for so long have been proud of the fact that we've been able to attract and retain incredible people to our province. She's outlining the very issue that we're seeing; we're seeing people leaving this province.

I wanted to point out that it's not just health care workers although we've heard a lot of health care workers are leaving this province: doctors, nurses, likely other health care workers now that this government is firing 11,000 of them. We're also seeing artists leave this province. In fact, I've shared with that same Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs the story of a young, queer artist who said, like – you know what? – he just didn't feel safe being in this province anymore, and he also didn't want to be in a province where he saw such utter disrespect towards arts and artists.

9:50

I wanted to just throw it back to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to wrap up her comments on why it is so important that we build a province that is truly welcoming, inclusive, supports and uplifts artists and all Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Since it was a question and a request . . .

Mr. Williams: No one else is standing, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: That's true. I do see the hon. Member for Peace River. [interjections] Not necessarily. She hasn't stood. The

only opportunity that I have – I can't ask somebody to talk in here. I can call and recognize people who want to discuss matters in here.

But at this time I do recognize the Member for Peace River, as I previously did, because the hon. member did not stand. I'm not trying to direct the course of this debate. I'm not trying to do that. I'm literally allowing the hon. members who wish to debate to take that opportunity.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to rise from a standing, not sedentary position, and speak to the Chamber, as is the custom in all parliaments across the western world. In this opportunity I'd like to remind members opposite that we on the government side of the benches support the arts. We support them, and we do not see them as nothing more than a group of individuals, stakeholder groups, that we need to pander to. The vast majority of artists in this province are dignified, self-employed, working individuals who want nothing more than the opportunity to use their entrepreneurial skills and create entertainment and beauty and creation for the province. Summing them up into nothing more than a stakeholder group that deserve funds and only in existence when that government can get it from the government is flat out false.

There are individuals across this province that labour hard every single day because they truly believe in beauty, the transcendent value that unites this country from coast to coast and this province top to bottom, and they believe they have a vocation, a calling to serve and create beautiful things for others. They don't do it because the government says so. They don't do it because members of the opposition say so. They don't do it because they receive funds from a handout. They do it because they believe in it, and as such, individuals who consume those beautiful goods, the entertainment, and the culture they create will pay for it. That is how the vast majority of art in this province is created.

It's a wonder sometimes. Members of the opposition make it sound as though the west had no culture until centralized status governments could subsidize it. Not true. It's been centuries, literally centuries, millennia – millennia – Mr. Speaker, that we have been creating culture in our civilization. We will continue to do so. Independent of what individuals in the leftist progressive NDP say, we will continue . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Socialists.

Mr. Williams: The socialists say so.

We will continue to support our entrepreneurs, whether they be private sector in creating art, private sector in creating oil rigs. This government stands behind all of them. It is important for us as a province to continue to look to those individuals and say, "How can we help you?" not, "How can we make you dependent on us and look to government for all the answers?"

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate. I believe that in this case it was the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, I just have to respond and contribute a little bit to this debate. I won't be long. We hear such dark, Orwellian bedtime stories coming from the caucus across the way from us here. In their version of doublespeak the province is virtually dying. Everybody is leaving. Investment is fleeing. Nothing is coming in. Everything is gone. Calgary is doomed. There's not a word of anything positive here. You'd think that's what they want to actually happen.

I'd actually like to bring the members opposite from 1984 into October 2020. The news in Calgary, actually, is that Calgary is to

break the venture capital attraction record in 2020, the most they have ever had in their history, and we're only two-thirds of the way through the year. They've had \$200 million of venture capital come into this province, not just stay here but actually come from outside into our province. It doesn't sound to me like everybody is fleeing. It doesn't sound to me like the dark bedtime story I've been hearing from across the way. I heard one of them say just a few minutes ago that there have been no jobs created. Well, in fact, the tech sector in Calgary saw a 27 per cent increase in employment this last year. No jobs. There's a double standard of speak here going on. I just don't get it.

The reality is that the dark things that they speak of, the doom and gloom that they envision was all created under their administration and their regime. There's a new day dawning in Alberta. It's in the headlines of 2020 in Calgary. It's happening, and people are coming here to invest, \$200 million worth, a record. People are getting new jobs. There's a new day. That's how I know that, well, coming back to this bill, Bill 35, when you give people a tax break, when you incentivize business, they come in droves. Calgary will prosper. Alberta will prosper. There's incredible ingenuity and inventiveness in this province, and things are looking up, my friends.

I would just encourage the members opposite to actually read the current news or at least acknowledge that it's happening once in a while instead of telling us this endless, dark, spinning hopelessness, which is the only story they seem to know.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anybody wishing to make quick comments or questions.

Seeing none, are there any members who would like to join debate? I do see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to add some thoughts here this evening to Bill 35, the tax statutes. As my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview had mentioned, you know, bit of a debate as to whether it will be creating jobs and driving innovation. What we saw when the government, formed here by the UCP, came in touting – the Premier was very, very clear in promising that by giving a great big corporate tax giveaway, it was going to create 50,000 jobs. He was very, very specific about that number. Pre-pandemic we saw a loss of 55,000 jobs. Those are the facts. That's what happened, whether they like it or not.

What they also went and did – and I know my colleague had mentioned this before. They came in and they cut a bunch of programs because it was an NDP idea or whatever, a socialist idea, whatever word that they want to insert here. The bottom line was that those were spurring industry. When we look at things like cutting the digital media tax credit, cutting the Alberta investor tax credit, cutting the Alberta capital investment tax credit, those have had consequences. The \$4.7 billion didn't do it.

I've spoken with my small-business owners in Edmonton-Decore. Like I said – I think I mentioned this just the other day, Mr. Speaker – I was buying some flowers for my wife to celebrate our anniversary, and the owner of the flower shop said: "\$4.7 billion did nothing to help my business. It didn't drive more customers to my store. It didn't drive more corporate orders to my store. It's done nothing for me." That's something that I've heard over and over again.

I want to talk a little bit about some more facts. I'm going to loop back here now to the digital media tax credit. I know my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you know, sometimes feels I speak ad nauseam about this. This was one of the things that I

suggested that he look at, and I'm very, very grateful that he did. The gaming industry, Mr. Speaker, is very, very big. We have some incredible postsecondary institutions in this province that train the individuals that work in this industry, but here was the problem: as soon as they graduated, they quickly went east or west. They went to Quebec, they went to Ontario, they went to B.C. because that's where those industries are that – guess what? – have tax credits.

10:00

Now, if we look at this industry – now, you know, members of this side have been accused of knowing nothing about business. If that is the case, then it should seem obvious to members opposite that if there's money to be made, that should be a business that we should be looking at. The gaming industry this year, Mr. Speaker, in 2020 is projected to make \$159.3 billion. That is up 9.3 per cent year over year. We look at 2019: they made a \$152 billion. In 2018 they made \$135 billion. That looks like an industry we should be getting a piece of that pie in.

Now, the good news is that we at least have our foot in the door here in Alberta. I don't know, Mr. Speaker, if you've ever had the opportunity to tour BioWare here in Edmonton. It's an amazing company. It's fascinating, quite honestly. You know, they are partnering up with EA games and are distributing games all over. So why wouldn't we want to incentivize more of that? It's certainly going on in the rest of Canada. That industry is projected by 2023 to be a \$200 billion industry.

Mr. Jason Nixon: How much?

Mr. Nielsen: It's \$200 billion, for the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

I think we should be getting a piece of that pie, Mr. Speaker. I really do. When I look at the employment figures – and I only picked three jurisdictions – right now, as of 2019, in Canada that industry was employing almost 28,000 full-time employees. In the U.K. they're employing approximately 27,000. In the U.S.: almost 242,000 jobs, full-time positions. Now, when I did a little bit of a look at what those employees were making here in Canada, in Quebec right now those full-time employees are averaging about \$66,200 a year. That's a pretty good mortgage-paying job. When we look over in Ontario, those employees in that industry are making \$70,100 per year. That's even a better mortgage-paying job. Right over in B.C., where, like I'd mentioned earlier, they all have tax credit incentives for that industry, those employees are making \$84,000 per year. Those are some very significant wages. As we know, those people will be paying taxes, which the government can then use to fund programs.

Wouldn't it seem to be remiss to not invest in that industry? Once that digital media tax credit was halted, there were some companies that not only did they throw out the boat anchor, Mr. Speaker; I think they probably grabbed a rope, tied a piano to it, and threw that out as well to stop from coming here. The infrastructure was already in place: the health care, the education. They also had the people. They had access to the people, and they didn't have to ship them across the country to bring them to the industry. They would've had them right here in their very backyard. The decisions that this government has made either put things at risk or completely shut it down, and more of the latter that we've seen.

Mr. Carson: Game over.

Mr. Nielsen: As my friend from Edmonton-West Henday said, game over. We have missed out on that.

Now, this current grant that they're bringing in is a bit of a half-hearted attempt, I think, at maybe trying to somehow say: well,

maybe we were wrong; maybe we should have done something about it, so we'll try to cover up here a little bit, and hopefully nobody will notice. We saw tech firms pulling out, jobs were lost, and the economy shrank. But, hey, that \$4.7 billion: that's going to change the game. That's going to make all the difference in the world.

What have we been seeing? We've been seeing those big corporations paying their shareholders. We've seen those big corporations investing in other jurisdictions, not Alberta. We've again just recently seen yet some more employment lost. But, hey, let's double down on that 4.7 because eventually, hopefully, it will sometime work. It was promised, 50,000 jobs. That was the promise. I guess that promise was as good as that health care guarantee that was signed by the Premier. We don't know what happened to that either.

Hopefully, once we get into Committee of the Whole, we'll get an opportunity to discuss a little bit further, maybe have some questions answered. I'm curious because there are members that were part of the 29th Legislature who sit on the government bench, who sit in the government caucus, and I remember very, very clearly that they were always asking for the economic analysis of what we were doing: "Where is that? You need to do an economic analysis. We need to send it to committee so we can do an economic analysis." So we asked: where was the analysis that will show that jobs will be created, that investment will come by giving a great big corporate giveaway? Well, there hasn't been one, and we FOIPed it. Nothing comes back, but hopefully in Committee of the Whole maybe we'll get a chance to see some of those documents, but you'll have to forgive me, Mr. Speaker, if I don't hold my breath just in case.

I know that I was saying to my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that the Premier did say that it would be absolutely irresponsible for companies not to move to Alberta. So I'm curious if maybe, with some of the companies that the government has been talking to, if they've been saying that to them, you know: it would be irresponsible of you; you better come to Alberta. Not my words.

We have this Bill 35 in front of us, claiming that it's going to create jobs, claiming that we'll drive innovation, I guess. For the benefit of the government, I hope that that actually happens because ultimately at the end of the day it will be Albertans that pay for it when jobs aren't created, when investment isn't brought in, just like they'll be paying for a privatized health care system, just like they'll be paying for an education system that no longer will be the envy of the world, when Albertans are paying for their medications, when our most vulnerable are left behind because they can't access the services they need because they can't access the funds to just live in dignity and respect, because it was more important to give a great big corporate tax break that hasn't created any jobs, that hasn't brought in any investment.

10:10

But my hope is that some of this – like I was mentioning earlier, just one tiny example through the gaming industry of what could be brought in to Alberta, of what we could be getting a slice of. There are many, many other things. You know, we've certainly seen, I guess, a glimmer of hope around renewable energy. We have a bill before us on geothermal. It would be exciting to see some other stuff around that to provide Albertans with an opportunity to lead the way because it always seems like we've been last to the buffet table. We always tell people that there's been this pot of money with Alberta's name on it while successive Conservative governments kept just pushing it away, saying: "Oh, it's okay. We've got this here. It will be fine. We don't need this." Why not? From a business point of view, if there's money to be made, let's grab it.

It's always interesting. I always get accused, you know, that I hate business, I just want to see it shut down. Mr. Speaker, I'm from the labour movement. I want to see good jobs. I want to see good unionized jobs, good unionized pay with good unionized benefits. Members opposite are laughing away, but it's funny because when you look down in the U.S., in states that have right to work, wages, not just unionized but wages in general, are anywhere from \$17,000 to as much as \$35,000 less.

The Acting Speaker: I see that 29(2)(a) is available, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has it.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore for his comments. I do have a comment and a question for the hon. member. He spoke at length about the interactive digital media tax credit, which, of course, was an idea that came from industry, who wanted to encourage our online, you know, gaming software developers to stay here in the province.

I'll give a quick little backstory, Mr. Speaker. Of course, everyone is familiar with BioWare, a company that was founded here in Edmonton. But what many people don't realize is that once upon a time, I would say about 10 years ago, BioWare had about 800 employees. They had attempted to speak to the government of the day to introduce a tax credit program to level the playing field. Well, the government refused, probably because they had some similar minds around their cabinet table that the current government does, and 500 of the 800 employees went to Quebec. Now, the employees didn't go to Quebec. Unfortunately, the Alberta employees lost their jobs, but 500 positions at BioWare went to Quebec because they have a very generous tax credit program. What Quebec realized, which this current government does not, is that we are competing for talent globally. Designers, software engineers know this, that they have a pick of the litter on where they are going to go work.

A fascinating side story, Mr. Speaker. When I was minister of economic development and trade, I led a mission down to Silicon Valley and sat down with Netflix. I said, "What's your policy on hiring?" They said: "Well, instead of trying to lowball employees on entry pay, we actually pay 20 per cent higher than the top pay in industry. We go right to paying them more than anyone else because we want them to work for us, and we understand their value." It's not about a race to the bottom. In fact, they are happy – happy – to pay their employees really well because what they want are the best employees working under the best conditions to produce the best outcomes. They get that. Value employees, they will be loyal, and they will work hard. So that's what they did.

Again, BioWare has been advocating for a tax credit or some kind of program to level the playing field for years and years, Mr. Speaker. Under our government we listened to them and introduced a tax credit program, which this government abolished.

Now, my question to the hon. member is that under our government we had a differentiating factor to the tax credit program that I'm hoping the member can speak to. It came from industry that there's a recognition that the majority of people who work in the gaming industry all fit a certain profile, which is, if people are wondering and then listening at home, made up traditionally of white males, the majority. Now, the fascinating part, Mr. Speaker, is when you look at postsecondaries, at the classrooms, and how diverse they are. They are full of women, people of colour. They are very diverse, yet what happens to them when they graduate? Why aren't they hired? Why aren't they in these companies? So it was the industry who said to add on an additional 5 per cent diversity, a diversity portion to the tax credit. I'm curious if the

Member for Edmonton-Decore can talk about the impact that that had on many companies in the province.

The Acting Speaker: I see the Member for Edmonton-Decore has actually risen to respond to the question, and I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is quite right. Traditionally, within the industry we had a lack of diversity, so this incentive that was brought in by the previous NDP government opened some doors for some companies to maybe think a little bit further outside of the box, and the talent pool that they started to have access to was quite phenomenal, actually. When you have that type of diversity within that industry, I must say that I myself do think the games get much, much better, and like I said of BioWare here in Edmonton, I do play some of their games. I think that we have an opportunity that we don't want to miss out on here.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I do just want to be clear. Often members in this House ask questions of one another, and often those questions – and I've witnessed it myself – go unanswered. The way to answer those questions, should you want to, is to, obviously, jump up and try to see if you can be recognized by the Speaker.

Now, moving back to second reading proper of Bill 35, are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for recognizing me. Once again it's my honour to choose the opportunity to rise in the House and speak to the bill on behalf of my constituents. Albertans deserve a government that has their backs, that will invest in people, and will build an economic recovery for every Albertan. That is exactly what the UCP said to Albertans before the election, and that is exactly how the UCP has explained to Albertans that their \$4.7 billion tax giveaway will help Alberta's economy recover. As the hon. member and Minister of Justice and Solicitor General said, this is a false claim, that \$4.7 billion amount, but I see that in the budget, page 144, this is what it says, that over the next four years the government will provide \$4.7 billion in tax relief. If this minister wanted to make a correction to the document and also for most documents, the government House members – but every time we refer to this figure, we're referring to exactly how it is said in the government documents.

As far as the government's claim that this is not an ideological move, that this was a job-creation plan, I just wanted to bring an article into reference. This article was published way before 2019. The article was published by the Center for American Progress under the economy section, and the name of the article is Trickle-Down Tax Cuts Don't Create Jobs. It was published on August 24, 2017, and written by Seth Hanlon and Alexandra Thornton.

10:20

I will not read the full article. I just wanted to bring this information into the conversation, what it says about trickle-down effects. It says:

Trickle-down effects have consistently failed to benefit working families.

The article notes:

The past quarter century . . . not years,

. . . has tested the supply-side theory that top-bracket tax cuts would boost economic growth and jobs. This theory has decidedly failed.

There are some facts. It says:

- In 1993, President Bill Clinton raised taxes on top earners from 31 per cent to 39.6 per cent. Conservatives predicted disaster; instead, the economy boomed. 23 million jobs were created and the economy grew for 32 straight quarters in what was then the longest expansion in history.
- By contrast, in 2001 and 2003, President George W. Bush cut income taxes substantially, lowering the top rate to 35 per cent while also lowering top rates on capital gains and dividends. Conservatives maintained that the tax cuts would turbocharge economic growth; in fact, conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation predicted that growth would be so strong that the United States would entirely pay off its debt by 2010.

That was stated in 2001 and 2003.

Instead, the ensuing years saw weak growth, followed by the 2008 economic collapse. And as economist Danny Yagan has found, the steep cuts in dividend tax rates signed into law by President Bush in 2003 did not increase corporate investment or worker pay.

It says:

- The Bush-era tax rates stayed in place through 2012, but at the end of that year, President Barack Obama struck a deal to restore the 39.6 percent top tax rate and raise the tax rates on capital gains and dividends. Again, many conservatives predicted doomsday. However, the economy grew steadily, and the expansion is still continuing.

These are some of the professional arguments from economists based on the statistics. It has a chart, figure 1 in this article, that says:

Over the past 25 years, private sector job growth has been stronger after tax increases on the rich than after tax cuts.

The average annual job growth after President Bill Clinton raised the top rate: 2.58 per cent. The average annual job growth after President George W. Bush lowered the top rate: .66 per cent. The average annual job growth after President Barack Obama raised the top rate: 2.05 per cent. Those are the statistics. They are there. They are in America, and these policies have been exercised and experienced all around the globe, where it has almost bankrupted a number of countries in South Asia. We have seen after the 2008 economic crisis that city after city in U.S. states have gone bankrupt after these policy experiments.

I don't know, like, what word we should use. I always want to be respectful when making the argument. It's so ludicrous, 15 or 16 months after your job-creation plan – as my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has raised the concern: how many jobs after 16 months can you tie to your job-creation plan, that you have planned? I think this was one of your first steps when coming into government, that you wanted to rush into that in the name of that being your election promise and that it will boost the Alberta economy. Since then, when you said: 50,000 jobs in the first year – technically, the province was 105,000 jobs down by the end of the year, even before the pandemic. So 50,000 jobs that were promised by this job-creation plan were not created; instead, Albertans saw 50,000 jobs lost in the province. So 105,000 jobs down from your projections.

We are still stubborn and still don't see – how do you say? – the integrity and decency we should have after 16 months, and this is not only my argument; this is not only my concern. This was the same concern that was shared by the hon. the Minister of Energy last year, in November 2019. She admitted to the journalist in replying to the questions that, yes, there needs to be some kind of review. What went wrong? Why hasn't it created the predicted results?

Now, when we're discussing this, why I said ludicrous, why it's painful to discuss this after this experience of a year and a half: the money going to rich corporations, the corporations who picked up billions of dollars and are packing up their projects from Alberta is concerning. I think that is a very legitimate argument to make, and we need very honest debate in this House. We are willing to play the constructive opposition role in this, and that is a need of today.

The government is not only going forward on their plan, but through this bill they're convincing us, they're convincing the opposition, they're trying to convince Albertans that we'll speed up on that plan now instead of implementing it in the next three years: "Let's do it in one year. Let's get all those corporations, rack up all that money we were going to give them in four years in this year, this one year, and that will probably create the jobs." That is very concerning.

When we make this argument – I really want to touch a little bit on what my colleague from Edmonton-Decore has emphasized, the tax credits on, you know, digital media, artificial intelligence, the tech sector, basically. We claim to be so wise, so intelligent, and I will include everyone in the House. One of the top successful businesses in this economy is in the tech sector. We all have phones. We all have laptops. Let's look at Apple, one of the top stocks, Facebook, all technology, Google. What this government's intelligent plan focused on jobs proposed is to cut those sectors.

10:30

I know what we're offering to our next generations, and I know that hundreds and hundreds of students are being graduated from NAIT and MIT and struggling. My own son: you know, I just convinced him hard to try his luck first in the province, not to give up easily. He graduated in April, and now it's six months since he graduated. There's no luck finding a job in Alberta, but every time he presents to me the offers or alternates being seen in B.C., being seen in the U.S., being seen in Ontario.

I don't know: what is our reason? What are we trying to get out of it exactly? If we say that we are pro energy sector and we support you and we are for it, you think that you can do it going forward without using technology and we don't need technology here. This is a missed plan that is by whatever reason – the government needs to refocus. Without diversifying the economy and, I think . . .

The Acting Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a) is available, and I believe that the hon. member who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a) I'd certainly like to ask the member if indeed in his deliberations his conclusion became the same one that I have come to with respect to my observations regarding government policy and the current legislation before us, whereby the government is legally accelerating the corporate income tax cut that was announced in the summer at a time when the top-of-mind issues in this province for the members of the public in Alberta are the economy and the pandemic.

At this point in time what they're seeing is a government who is seeing fit to accelerate an income tax cut for corporations that so far has had zero effect. What's it good for? Absolutely nothing. What's it done, Mr. Speaker? I think that the opposition is really scratching their heads and trying to come up with some rationalization for this \$4.7 billion giveaway that didn't work and resulted in EnCana moving to the U.S. after getting \$52 million, Husky taking \$252 million and laying off 271 people in Calgary and investing elsewhere, TC Energy laying off people, mergers as a result of the companies having less value, the Cenovus-Husky merger, laying

off 2,000 people after getting \$600 million. Time after time this so-called investment of tax breaks to corporations certainly hasn't worked.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows: I'm wondering if he is, like myself and many Albertans across the province, actually wondering about the competence of this government. That's the question that's on the minds of Albertans increasingly when you look at a tax cut like this in the middle of pandemic and the priority of the government seems to be giving tax holidays from governments. What's happening is that the people of this province are seriously looking at the actual competence of this government. [interjections] That's what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, and I'm wondering if the Member for Edmonton-Meadows has heard that in his constituency as well, where people are rightfully talking amongst themselves and asking their MLA, as they are me, what indeed this government has up its sleeve next, will it actually show some leadership, or whether or not they're actually questioning this government's ability to lead and its underlying competence in leading the province through a serious pandemic and an economic downturn that requires rather different policies than what the government is proceeding with right now.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen in response to a question that has been posed to him under 29(2)(a).

I would also just mention from this vantage point that I know there's been some heckling and things of that nature, but I will say that the smiles have actually been on all sides. That said, I would just remind all members of this House that the member with the call at this time is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you. I would really appreciate your courtesy, Mr. Speaker. How much time do I have?

The Acting Speaker: A minute and 30.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I wanted to say: the contrast in this. We have seen the wildcat strike yesterday, whatever. In one way, what are the consequences that Albertans face due to this decision? No jobs. When the government just – you know, the minister is answering the questions in QP on the money savings in health care: \$5 million, \$2 million, \$10 million. It's really a joke compared to what we see when companies are picking up billions of dollars and packing their projects, moving out of the province or out of the country, not creating jobs.

The impact of these policies: I just wanted to quickly, proudly add my personal experience. My younger son, a special-needs child, who's in a class during COVID, the class not having enough resources because of the government policies, the teacher having the different levels of classes merge – there's only one teacher trying to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stole my own thunder earlier. I think I might have a little bit more of a salvo left in me, though. I will continue this evening to track what my constituents are telling me about this government's performance, particularly in the midst of a pandemic, which is in the middle of a resurgence, where we're seeing record numbers of cases in the province, in particular in Edmonton. I know that their attention is riveted on that as they fear for their loved ones. I know that I have an elderly mother of my own whose safety and health I'm very

concerned about right now in the face of the increasing case numbers in this province.

On top of that, of course, many, many Alberta families are very concerned about their economic well-being because the unemployment rate is high, job losses are great, and the potential exists, Mr. Speaker, for further shutdowns and other measures to control the pandemic if indeed the numbers reach threshold levels. Already in this past week we've seen measures where certain municipalities have reached threshold levels of cases, which forced them to invoke mask-wearing measures, such as in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and, I believe, also in Spruce Grove. That is where the attention of Albertans is focused, Mr. Speaker.

In the midst of these two overwhelmingly important considerations, our economy, which is in a serious downturn, as well as the pandemic, which is partly the reason for it, the province is suffering a crisis in the confidence of its government. It is apparent in conversations with my constituents. I've confirmed with the Member for Edmonton-Meadows that his as well are now openly beginning to question the competence of this government. It's not a matter of simply looking at priorities that are of minor consequence, but the actual competence of this government is being questioned by Albertans.

10:40

That is something that I think a careful reading of this legislation before us – it's partly explained by that, where the priorities of the government seem to be focused on another era, where they look at a reduction of a corporate tax rate as being a panacea to assisting the economy to recover. Well, Mr. Speaker, even before the pandemic struck, that was proven false. We didn't see it create one job, and historically corporate tax rate cuts have been shown to be a false economy and not one that would be motivating corporations to create jobs. In fact, we've seen a flight of capital from the province by companies which received the benefit of these corporate tax cuts, so many examples I mentioned earlier in comments made in the House today about companies, particularly in the energy sector, which either are no longer here or went and involved themselves in a merger or moved to other jurisdictions after receiving the generosity of this government by receiving a corporate tax gift in the way of a reduction in the corporate tax rate.

Rightly so, conversations in the restaurants and barbershops of this province, in my office with constituents, with people whose children are in schools that are suffering either a reduction in staff because of the outbreak of COVID-19 or perhaps a shutdown or parents who are fearful of sending their children to school as a result of the virus – the government focus seems to be one of mitigating or minimizing the effect of this virus and crossing their fingers that it's going to go away. It really matters to this population in the province. People are worried and rightfully so.

They don't have faith that this government's priorities are where they should be, especially in light of legislation such as we're seeing here today in Bill 35, where the government is intent on following through with a dead-letter piece of legislation, a policy to lower the corporate tax rate, to accelerate the lowering of that corporate rate tax, with no evidence, first of all, that it was ever going to be something that created jobs. Also, now, in the middle of a pandemic it seems to be that they're drilling a bigger hole in the bottom of a boat when, in fact, they can see that the boat is sinking already. It doesn't make any sense for the government to come through with this measure right now.

Rightfully, Albertans are wondering what in the world this government is thinking by coming forward with this type of a measure at this point in time, when their minds are focused on

family survival. It's not a question of debating about whether this tax rate is going to do anything. People aren't focused on that at all, Mr. Speaker. They are absolutely engaged and fully captivated by their family's need to scramble to survive. I mean, we are hearing stories of folks who are very grateful that their parents actually own a house because they're renting and they can't afford to pay the rent and the landlord is not obviously giving them free rent, so they're giving up their rental place, moving their furniture into their parents' basement, and stacking two families together, two generations together, just to survive. That's a story that you hear quite commonly in this province right now when more than one job is lost. You know, oil patch jobs were lost, and many families were sustained by a well-paid public service job that, of course, now is disappearing because of the government's austerity measures, another policy, such as this tax measure, which is very misguided and which Albertans are questioning and seriously questioning, to the point that they're wondering about the competence of this government.

Why in the world are they making decisions to lower a corporate tax rate when, in fact, what they should be looking at is supporting families with that \$4.7 billion? That would have gone a long ways to assisting with PPE, to assisting with making sure there were adequate supports for teachers. Perhaps we had other, larger buildings that could accommodate students in smaller class sizes so that we would attract more students to the school system. There could have been some supports for special-needs students so that they could be properly accommodated at home with supports. They're looking at perhaps better supports for women in the workplace in particular because indeed we want to save the employment and employability of women, who are so far amongst the most hard hit by this pandemic and the economic downturn.

Those supports are needed. It's investment by government in people, in services that directly affect families that are the most important things to Albertans right now, Mr. Speaker. It's not giving \$4.7 billion to corporations who take the money and run. It's giving money to families in dire need right now in this province that people in this province believe the government should be focused on. Because that focus is not there, people are starting to question the competence of the government, and they're losing faith. They're losing confidence in this government.

I really hope that the tone and the attention of this government will turn away from legislation like Bill 35 and focus perhaps on things like we have been able to offer and that we are encouraging Albertans to consider under a website that they can look at called albertasfuture.ca, where we're looking at an economic plan that really consults with Albertans and looks at what's going to benefit your family right now and not looking at a corporate tax break that's necessarily going to, in somebody's mind, attract a company to Alberta to create jobs.

In an economy that we're in right now, in a pandemic that's not going to go away any time soon, we need a government, Mr. Speaker, that is very, very focused on the economic realities that we're at and definitely is listening to Albertans and their real needs right now. That means not only the needs of the individual families but also the businesses and the supports that they need to survive. They're looking at potentially another closure because of the threshold levels of the virus being reached in many municipalities.

The government failed the last time around to give adequate notice to businesses. We even spoke this morning in the Public Accounts Committee and asked the deputy minister about the timeline as far as when the Premier or cabinet actually knew about the crisis. Like, after February 11, apparently, there was a meeting of the cabinet committee, an emergency management meeting, and there were

contingencies, let's say, talked about, as far as the deputy minister was concerned, contingencies and planning given different potentialities and development of the virus. It was well known by that time globally that we were facing a very big problem, yet there was no expectation of a proper response. One certainly wasn't forthcoming in the Public Accounts Committee this morning because there was an effort sort of to say that the realities weren't fully known. It was difficult to try to coerce or attempt to get a full answer.

10:50

That's something that we should be knowing about because it relates to what we're talking about today, and that is the concerns that Albertans have about the competence of this government. Why, in fact, when the government was planning and making contingency plans about measures they might take in response to the pandemic as early as February 11, was that level of concern not shared with Albertans? In fact, at what point was that level of concern first publicly declared? Those are the kinds of things that we should be knowing. I would like to think that the people, the men and women and children of this province, have a right to know when they are faced with a public emergency such as a pandemic. I sure would like to hear from the government about the first opportunity they had to share their concerns and if there was a delay in publicly disclosing to Albertans what, in fact, the greatest fears of the government were, when they first knew it.

I think Albertans should be trusted with the realities that we face. The government has a responsibility to share that information with the public. Not doing so I think shows a mistrust of the public and perhaps a fear for their own skin as the government, and perhaps rightfully so. I've mentioned numerous times that the public is losing faith. They do not think the government is handling this pandemic very well. Tell you what: if indeed we end up seeing more closures and shutdowns happening, they're going to be really seriously asking, Mr. Speaker, what in the world this government is doing tinkering with corporate tax rates in the hope they'll somehow produce some economic miracle when, in fact, there are much more serious issues and fundamental issues that we need to be facing to rectify an economic downturn that is threatening the very economic foundation of the province.

Families have a right to be asking these questions. We as members of the opposition are rightfully demanding answers from the government. We don't need a government to fail us at this particular juncture, Mr. Speaker. The issues are serious. The prospects for serious outcomes and failures of families in terms of bankruptcies, business bankruptcies, are very real. People are more than jittery in this province. They are absolutely looking for leadership, and we're not finding it in this provincial government right now. I think we have to have a much more forthcoming and direct and completely transparent method of communication from this government to Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be any takers. I am not seeing any.

Would anybody like to join debate?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, at this time I ask to adjourn the debate on Bill 35.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had a very productive evening, having considered bills 38, 40, and 35. I do

want to thank all members of this House, on both sides, for the spirited debate we've had tonight.

At this point in time I would like to move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 28, 2020.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Those were some nice comments.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:54 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 38	Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020	2795
Bill 40	Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020	2800
Bill 35	Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020.....	2803

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