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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, October 28, 2020

Day 59

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 28, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

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

[Adjourned debate October 27: Mr. Sigurdson]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly this evening is Bill 40. I see . . . [interjections] Order.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to address Bill 40 and to talk about some of the concerns that I have about the importance of the preservation of one of Alberta's greatest natural resources, and that is the forest and, of course, the forest lands and the forest waters and the forest soils, that are all very important to the integrity of our well-being in this province, both from an economic point of view but, of course, perhaps even more importantly, from a life-giving point of view, the sustaining of all that we do from our natural ecosystem.

I have had an opportunity to look at Bill 40, and of course my first comment is one which I'm sure that the government will hear a number of times, and that is that this is far too little of an attempt to move some legislation forward that has not been moved forward in quite some time. The government is actually right in saying that it has not been addressed appropriately in this Legislature for very many years – and I guess that's on many of us – but I was hoping that once it did get to arrive in the Legislature, we would be able to see that some important work was done, that the background work was done, that the depth of the product that was produced would be one that we could all sink our teeth into and get behind because it is such an important area for us here in the province of Alberta.

Unfortunately, that's not what we have. Unfortunately, we have a quick attempt to move a small piece of what should have been done forward, and of course it reflects only a very narrow range of the interests that are important in this particular area. [interjections] I know the government even specifically says that they are proud of the fact that they have consulted with some of the industry partners and believe that the industry partners will be happy with the outcome. I think that in 2020 to say that we have looked at one small, narrow view of an issue . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt; however, I'm finding it difficult to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I think the hon. member is on his feet; he deserves the respect of an Assembly that is listening. If you'd like to have private conversations, please take it to the lounges.

The hon. member.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I was noticing the sound, and given that I'm half deaf in both ears, that's quite amazing.

I think that this is a bill that should have been important, and it is a bill that isn't. As I was saying, the government is proud that they met with one group of people to talk about advancing the legislation

and failed to meet with everyone else. I'm not quite sure why they would feel proud about that in this day and age, where we understand that issues are complex, that there are a variety of points of view on the issue, that a multitude of issues need to be explored in depth, and that some common theme needs to be drawn from the interests of many different parties in creating a bill. I guess that's the basis of my disappointment.

Now, as the previous Minister of Indigenous Relations I'm going to address primarily my concern that the consultation with indigenous communities has yet to happen on the government side. I am happy to say that the critic for agriculture on our side and myself have indeed conducted some consultation in the indigenous community, had the chance so far to meet with quite a number of chiefs in the province of Alberta and talk about their concerns.

I can tell you that their first concern, which was spoken to quite eloquently by one of the members of the community, was that this is fundamental to their rights and who they are as people. We are talking about the land. We're talking about the land on which they have sustained themselves for untold years, to which they are deeply connected in both the practical and physical sense but in the spiritual and community sense as well. They're very concerned that while their rights are completely described under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 35, which specifically addresses indigenous rights to harvesting and therefore the preservation of the land, and in spite of the fact that the Supreme Court of Canada has upheld that section of the Charter and said that governments must consider the indigenous rights when they're addressing issues such as land and forests, that they must consider the rights of the First Nations people, here we have a piece of legislation that does absolutely none of that.

I mean, it's less than four months since the decision on Prosper versus Fort McKay First Nation came out, in which, again, the courts explicitly told this government: you cannot ignore indigenous Charter rights; your decisions must reflect those rights. It's gone to the highest court of the land. It's been repeated over dozens of times. This government has actually lost a court decision on that very basis, and here they are again introducing a piece of legislation affecting Charter rights without consulting the people whose rights are going to be violated. That's extremely problematic, from my point of view, and that was expressed to our minister – excuse me; our future minister, I'm sure – our critic of Agriculture and Forestry and myself just the other day. I think that I certainly would like to see this government put this bill on hold until they've had a chance to do what they should have done in the first place and do the right thing and speak with indigenous communities.

Now, there are a number of particular issues within those Charter rights, three of which I'll try to mention today if I happen to have the time left to me here. One of them, of course, I've already made mention of, and that is the Charter right for hunting, trapping, and fishing, all of which are affected directly and specifically by forestry and tree harvesting. Now, I'm very concerned because it feels like this is part of a larger pattern that this government needs to address.

When we were in government, I was very proud to sit down with elders of the First Nations who are members of the Treaty 8 Trappers Association and to sign an MOU between the government of Alberta and the Treaty 8 Trappers Association to support their trapping and to support their ability to maintain their traplines and to pass on those traplines to members of their families, their clans, and their nations and to support the teaching of the next generation in learning the skills necessary to maintain those traplines. It was a fundamental response by our government to the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and was done in

consultation with the elders themselves who are members of this association. It was really an important day when we signed the Treaty 8 Trappers Association memorandum of understanding.

Now, I understand that subsequently this government has come in and has told the Treaty 8 Trappers Association that they will not honour the memorandum of understanding, and I am just absolutely dumbstruck with the gall of doing that after all the times I've heard members of the government side stand up and say that they believe in reconciliation. They often use the trite phrase "reconciliation." Now, I don't think that the phrase is trite. Going back on myself, I don't think the phrase is trite. I think their use of the phrase is trite. Here we are: a simple action. They didn't even have to do anything. All they had to do was follow through with action that we had put in place when we were in government, to simply honour a signed agreement between the government of Alberta and the Treaty 8 Trappers Association, and they failed to do that.

7:40

In fact, they told the association that they essentially are going to let the memorandum of understanding die, not follow through with it at all. That just, really, to me, to our side of the House, is completely unacceptable, and I would really like to see them go back to both this bill and the trappers association memorandum of understanding.

Further, there are nations in this province who continue to have treaty land entitlements. Now, for those of you who may not know what a treaty land entitlement is, when First Nations communities were established and the land was assigned to families who had signed on to treaties 6, 7, and 8, the reality is that the governments of the time were really without scruples on this and simply undercut the amount of land that was actually agreed to when they assigned the size of First Nations communities. So while they were supposed to get a certain number of acreage per family, what we have found over the years is that very rarely – in fact, I venture to say, I could probably say that never were First Nations actually given the full amount of land that should have been attributed to them.

Of course, the First Nations always have to go to court to make this work out, and after some court hearings it was determined that whenever the original list of family members that should have received land can be identified – and they all can be in one way or another because records were kept – we need to go back and look at how much land was not given to the nations when it should have been given. That is called a treaty land entitlement, land you're entitled to that you did not get.

Now, let me say one good thing about the Conservative government of the past under Premier Ralph Klein. He took this on seriously, and he began to sign off on those treaty land entitlements and to provide lands that had been neglected and withheld from the First Nations. When we got into government, we, too, did the same thing. We moved things along, and we started to ensure that the lands that were appropriately to be given to First Nations were indeed given to them. We weren't able to sign them all off, but we certainly moved them along. I had a number signed off, and we were moving along on the final few that there are left.

Now what we have is this government making the decision to extend forestry practices in the very places where many of these First Nations have their treaty land entitlements; that is, land will be taken up by the forestry industry. Under the legislation, once the land is taken up, it is no longer available for TLEs. As a result, nations like Beaver First Nation, for example, in northern Alberta, which does have a TLE, will have to search around these forestry plots and find little pieces of land that are outside of the forestry zones, and unfortunately that means that they're going to get land that is less good and land that is broken up and not in a solid block.

I don't think it's really appropriate for us to be undermining a 150-year-old right without some kind of consultation about how this is going to affect this particular nation or any other nation as we go forward. I'm very concerned that the consultation hasn't been done, that we're not honouring section 35 treaty rights, and that we're not honouring TLEs.

Finally – I know I'm running out of time – I want to remind people that we have a national agreement on caribou, which was also not considered when we went ahead with this particular piece of legislation.

All I'm asking is for the government to bring these people to the table, to have discussions on these important matters before they introduce legislation that's going to affect those matters. If indeed they have broken people's Charter rights, if indeed they have broken an agreement with the federal government, if indeed they've broken an MOU with the Treaty 8 Trappers Association, they are likely to have to come back to this after the fact. So why do that? Why bring in legislation when you know that you will be called, perhaps by the courts, to come back to this House to re-examine this legislation and to ensure that the rights that should have been considered are indeed considered?

That's the basis of my request here this evening: put this legislation on hold, take the time, do the consultations, show up at the First Nations, meet them face to face, ask about their needs, and address those needs before the legislation is brought to this House again.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin my remarks under 29(2)(a) with respect to Bill 40, I'd ask the indulgence of the House by noting that on my way to the House this evening, while listening to the car radio and newscast, I heard about the very tragic death of Meghan Weis, a teacher, 36 years of age, who taught grade 5 and 6 in French immersion capacity at Our Lady of the Prairies, a Catholic school in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung.

It's with a heavy heart that I heard of such a tragic loss of a young life in a horrific road accident in the community on the Henday, the second in two days that such an accident has occurred. This time it took a life. I have had a family member of my own die in a tragic and senseless road accident, so I have a sense of how Meghan's family is feeling right now. Not only that, I'd like to extend my condolences and sincere heartfelt acknowledgement of their grief to her family and friends in the community as well as her close family and friends and her school family and friends, her work associates, a horrific time in Our Lady of the Prairies school.

I know that she was loved by everyone that she met in the community. All of her students are mourning her loss, and it's a very, very sad day in the Edmonton-McClung community and the Catholic school community, indeed the whole of the teaching community throughout the province when we lose somebody so gifted in such a tragic way.

Thank you for that indulgence, Mr. Speaker. I will continue with my remarks now under 29(2)(a) with respect to Bill 40. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had quite a bit more to say particularly on, I think, elements of what he had mentioned early on in his remarks, the thin gruel that this bill actually represents, where after 50 years the government had an opportunity to really do a deep dive and get involved in many other aspects of the Forests Act and bring it to a true modernization.

One of the things that I noted that I've seen in correspondence from a member of the Alberta wildlife association, Carolyn

Campbell, is that they really missed an opportunity to involve themselves in looking at the forest ecosystems and how indeed they are protected under forest management agreements, and nothing of the sort was done to get into that area of discussion. I'm thinking perhaps the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford might want to expand a bit more on how the ecosystems element of forest management might have been touched upon more in this legislation.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that I only have a few moments, so I would like to just quickly address some of the things that this government could do if they're looking at forestry legislation. I think it would start with a broadening and a re-establishing of the definition of "sustainable forestry practices" in this province. We certainly would like to see them take some time to look at what that looks like and to look at how that fits into the larger questions of the ecosystem. How does that fit into, you know, sustainable forest soil practices, sustainable forest water practices, all of those things? How does this affect a variety of wildlife, for example, the burrowing owl or, as I mentioned earlier, the caribou? I would ask them to take the time to look at: how are these native species of birds and animals and fish being affected by the forestry practices, and how do we ensure that we may continue to employ forestry practices while at the same time maintaining the larger ecosystem within which the forestry practices are occurring?

7:50

I want to be very clear with this. On our side of the House we support forestry. We want forestry to continue to happen. We want us to have a plan in place that ensures that the nature of the forestry that we engage in ensures the well-being not only of the forestry industry but also the land on which the forestry industry depends so that they may be successful for time immemorial, that we know we will be able to go back and reforest areas again in future with the deep conviction that the land on which those forests are growing is being sustained in a reasonable and healthy manner.

Thank you.

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

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some of my thoughts on Bill 40, the Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020. I, first of all, want to address the spirit of this bill. It's my understanding, of course, that this is part of the government's lacklustre economic development plan. The economic situation that the province is in is extremely dire. The government doesn't seem to have any answers as to how to get the economy on track again, and, of course, we're presented with bills like this in the government's desperate attempt to make it look like it's doing something to improve Alberta's economy.

Of course, as I've said ever since the pandemic started, Mr. Speaker, on every piece of economic legislation that's come before this House, the first thing that the government must do to get the economy back on track is to get COVID under control. Unfortunately, the government has just decided to declare defeat when it comes to the COVID pandemic, not do anything to try to get the pandemic under control, cross its fingers, and hope for the best. Of course, we all know that that won't work.

I'm proud of our government's suggestions that we offered yesterday that would be an easy way – a simple way, not easy, Mr. Speaker – a simple way to get COVID under control, the economy back on track without having to require Albertans to go under a widespread lockdown again.

I want to spend the remainder of my time, Mr. Speaker, addressing this bill in particular, which deals with how Alberta manages its forests, and I note that in part 2 of this legislation the following preamble – they've amended or added the preamble before the enacting clause of the Forests Act – states that "whereas security of access to a sustainable timber supply is the basis of the forest industry's ability to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity." I want to address some of the issues of forestry sustainability that this government needs to take seriously if they are indeed serious about making sure that our forest industry can continue in a sustainable manner for generations to come.

The first issue, I think, that strikes at the heart of sustainable forestry is one that my friend from Edmonton-McClung raised in his comments in response to the speech that we heard from my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford and that was with respect to the allowable timber cut that the government has announced. Of course, we know that in the spring of this year the government is increasing the allowable timber cut to 13 per cent all across the province. Many conservationists, biologists, people who have expertise in forestry management, ecosystem management, environmental sustainability have raised red flags with respect to the increase in the allowable timber cut that the government announced earlier this year because as far as anybody can tell, Mr. Speaker, that number was pulled out of a hat and not based on any scientific evidence, not based on any metric of sustainability. It seemed like the minister was not satisfied with the share of the \$4.7 billion corporate handout that the government gave to the forestry industry but indeed wanted to make sure that the forest industry was also getting additional profits by increasing the allowable timber cut without any basis in sustainability, without any assessment of whether or not allowing that timber cut would be sustainable.

But more importantly than that, Mr. Speaker, with respect to sustainability of the forestry industry, the single most important thing that has affected and will continue to affect the sustainability of the forestry industry is climate change. Of course, we all heard some very concerning remarks from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright earlier this afternoon suggesting that he didn't believe that climate change was even happening. We certainly look forward to members of Executive Council repudiating the statements of that member and actually standing up and saying that not only is climate change a clear and present threat to the lives and livelihoods of Albertans, but there are tremendous opportunities to be had if we address the issue of climate change properly. But when it comes to managing forests, the government continues to dance around this issue of climate change and how it affects forest management here in Alberta.

It was, if I recall correctly, last spring, in the first sitting of this 30th Legislature, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for West Yellowhead brought forward a motion urging the government to tackle the problem of the mountain pine beetle to make sure that the forestry industry was sustainable. At that time huge chunks of northern Alberta were on fire. We couldn't even breathe in this Chamber because the air quality was so bad, and here we are talking about the mountain pine beetle as if it has nothing to do with climate change when, in fact, every scientist who has studied the matter says that mountain pine beetle is a symptom of climate change in that in order to get the mountain pine beetle infestation under control, we need to be serious about addressing climate change. But not once – not once – in that debate on that motion did any

government member even acknowledge the issue of climate change and certainly didn't go so far as to suggest that Alberta's forests would be better off if we took the issue of climate change seriously.

Of course, the government has undone a lot of the work on climate change that our government did. We, of course, set some targets for establishing renewable energy, making sure that our electricity sector doesn't emit as much greenhouse gas as it did before. The government has quietly decided to ignore those targets, I guess. We don't know. They have told us that they will no longer continue to measure the development of the renewable energy sector according to the 30 per cent goal that we established when we were in government. They shut down the energy efficiency agency, and they've scrapped a whole bunch of other programs that we funded that would allow municipalities and other organizations to transition to renewable energy, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they weakened the heavy industrial climate change emissions regulations so that the oil sands sector in particular doesn't have as stringent targets to meet as they did under our sector. The money that is collected under that fund is certainly not going towards any carbon dioxide emissions programs, certainly not to the extent that they were funded under our government.

If the government is serious about managing our forests in a sustainable manner, as it says that it intends to do when it amends this preamble that recognizes the sustainability of Alberta's timber supply as being the basis of the forestry industry's ability to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity, then I think it's high time that the government get serious about tackling climate change so that our forests can be managed sustainably and that future generations of Alberta can continue to rely on the forestry industry for good-paying jobs and economic development in many parts of the province.

8:00

I also want to address some of the issue of Charter rights that my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford raised in his remarks. It's incredibly concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that the government has brought this bill forward without doing any kind of consultation with First Nations whatsoever with respect to the impact that these changes in the legislation will have on their treaty rights. Of course, my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford highlighted a couple of concerning developments under this government with respect to disregarding the Charter rights of indigenous people in Alberta. He spoke about the government clearly expressing their unwillingness to recognize the memorandum of understanding that we developed with the Treaty 8 Trappers, and that's incredibly concerning. I certainly hope that the government decides to reverse that decision and recognize indigenous people's Charter rights in that regard.

He also spoke about neglecting treaty land entitlement rights and went on in great detail about how this could potentially impact treaty land entitlement rights that are guaranteed to indigenous people under the Charter.

Mr. Speaker, it's hard for all of us to keep track of all of the ways in which this government continues to ignore the Charter rights of treaty people, of indigenous people in Alberta, in both symbol and substantive action. Of course, one of the first things that they did when they were sworn in to government was to make a public declaration that they were no longer even going to acknowledge the treaty land upon which they were standing, and they don't do that any longer in their public announcements, which is a powerful symbol, I think, of the government's position on Alberta's indigenous people and their Charter rights.

Of course, we've seen a number of areas where the government has also neglected to consult with First Nations people on the impact that their decisions have on treaty rights. Certainly, with

respect to many of the decisions that have been made by Environment and Parks, the government has casually disregarded Alberta's indigenous rights. I think of, you know, the plan to sell off or close down almost 200 parks and recreation areas in Alberta. That was done completely without consultation with Alberta's indigenous people.

Moreover, the decision that the government has made to extend leases on public land from 10 to 25 years: that was done . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Sixty. Try to get your facts right.

Mr. Schmidt: . . . without consulting. I hear the minister from environment actually bragging about the fact that he's extended it to 60 years, Mr. Speaker, which makes their refusal to engage in consultation with Alberta's indigenous people that much more egregious. Considering that they're extending the length of these leases by six times what they were originally intended to be, then it's much more important for them to engage with indigenous people to make sure that these decisions don't . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: It's probably because they were too busy wishing for . . .

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schmidt: . . . encroach on their treaty rights. I know . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, we know the hon. member has trouble with the facts.

The Speaker: Order. Order. To the hon. Government House Leader: there is plenty of opportunity to join in the debate. If he'd like to do so from an upright position, he's welcome to do that, but from his sedentary position he will remain quiet.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Standing Order 13(2), Mr. Speaker. Can you explain how members don't have a right to speak inside the Chamber?

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you have plenty of opportunity to speak, all sorts of it, including when 29(2)(a) comes along. I called order. You immediately continued to heckle the member, at quite a loud volume, I might add. I'm happy to recognize you many times tonight. At this time the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish that exchange could have gone on a little longer. I was quite enjoying that.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: I am pleased to continue my remarks on Bill 40 and the discussion that I was having about this government's casual disregard for taking Alberta's indigenous people's Charter rights seriously.

Mr. Jason Nixon: You sound confused, Marlin. You're confused again.

Mr. Schmidt: As I was saying, the decision to extend leases on public land was made without consulting with indigenous people. In fact, the government is now in court . . .

Member Loyola: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

The hon. Official Opposition deputy whip, I believe.

Member Loyola: Whatever you want to call me, Mr. Speaker, I'm fine with because I don't need a title. The point of order I'd like to call on the member on the other side is 13(1). You've already ruled under 13(2) when he spoke to . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. Like, if you wanted to call a point of order under 13(1), that can happen immediately following a ruling. Just rising under Standing Order 13(1) because you don't like someone heckling in the House is also – like, the Speaker makes that judgment. You'll know that the members of the Official Opposition also like to heckle from time to time – and by “time to time” I mean quite regularly – and were reprimanded for doing so on a number of occasions during question period earlier today. I'm happy to have you join in the debate as well, but that is a wildly inappropriate use of Standing Order 13(1).

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm a little bit flustered because it's not usually me who comes out of these exchanges looking like the better person. [some applause]

The Speaker: Now we've found something we can all agree on.

Mr. Schmidt: Yep. It is hard to maintain my train of thought, Mr. Speaker, but I believe that I was speaking about the decision of the government to extend public land leases to 60 years without consultation. Of course, members opposite will know that the government is currently in court regarding that matter.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that concludes the time allotted.

We heard from the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung under the last 29(2)(a), so I think that we'll hear from the government side. The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It's always interesting to hear him present facts and to watch his party continue to mislead Albertans on a daily basis. He did not disappoint yet today, but as you listen to his comments, it becomes pretty clear that the member has absolutely no idea what he's talking about. Even inside of his comments he couldn't even get dates straight, he couldn't get time periods associated with leases straight, and he used several different numbers for campgrounds, couldn't even get the bill number straight. That's because the hon. member, of course, as we know and we see, is focused primarily on trying to raise money off people at home during a pandemic, during the largest recession since the Great Depression in this province, while people are hurting mainly because of the policies that the government that he used to be part of put on them.

Yet again tonight he presented facts that are not true and very verifiable to be able to confirm are not true. Again, he said that the government was selling parks. No park is for sale. That hon. member has admitted in this Chamber, in *Hansard*, that parks are not for sale but still goes out each day trying to make money for the NDP Party, pretending that parks are for sale, has indicated that there are 200 parks shutting, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred: that's their latest number. They started with 17, then a hundred and something, then 200. Again, the NDP struggle with the truth. That's what happens with the party across from us. They struggle with misinformation at any given time. It is quite disappointing. There is

not one provincial park that leaves the protection of Alberta Environment and Parks.

The hon. member also made clear again his disdain for business and for the people that create employment in our province, doubled down on the NDP's perspective of trying to make sure that nobody could have a business or succeed, complained that tourism leases inside our province would go from 25 years to 60 years, which helps them, Mr. Speaker. I know that the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis is very appreciative of the fact that the government moved the lease to 60 years. It created opportunity for tourism because you can't get financing with a 25-year lease to be able to build tourism projects inside the province. Unfortunately, that hon. member was part of a government that didn't care if a business was created anywhere inside this province.

8:10

So, yes, Mr. Speaker, he is correct. We moved to 60 years. What he is wrong about is that that is not 10 times 25 years. It's a little over double. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon: he's a teacher. Maybe he can help the hon. member with his math.

It is disappointing to continue to see the hon. member, a member who has wished female politicians dead in this place, a member who continually has to apologize for his ridiculous behaviour, continue to rise in this Chamber repeatedly, Mr. Speaker, and present false facts that he's already admitted on the record. He admitted on the record that what he is saying is not accurate, but he continues to misrepresent the facts to make money on the backs of Albertans. That's what you get from the NDP, complete and utter misrepresentation. Now, on one hand, they spend their time fearmongering; on the other hand, they make simple things up to try to make money.

The NDP disdain for the forestry industry also came out with that hon. member's comments. I'm proud, Mr. Speaker, to come from the great town of Sundre. My town depends each day on a sawmill that keeps that town going, as does the great town of Rocky Mountain House, which has been around since 1799. That hon. member seems to think that he can continue to go tell Rocky Mountain House how to keep care of their backyards. They've been doing it for couple of hundred years without his help. When the water that comes out of my constituency that flows here to Edmonton is as clean in that member's riding as it is in Rocky Mountain House when it leaves, then that hon. member can get up and lecture the people of Rocky Mountain House. He can certainly stop lecturing the forestry industry, that has been the backbone of this province for generations. I want, through you to all of my constituents and all Albertans that work in the forestry industry, to assure them: don't worry. Alberta has gotten a new government, and the NDP will never be in power again to shut them down like they did in the Castle park.

What happened in Spray Lake Sawmills underneath that member while he was a cabinet minister, Mr. Speaker, is outrageous, appalling, and downright disgusting. That's what that member's legacy was. That's what that member is part of. He wants to continue to block industry. He wants to continue to attack Albertans and the hard-working people that work our industries. Shame on him.

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

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. What a lovely opportunity to be able to respond to the gross response that we just heard from the

Government House Leader. I will start by clarifying that there are facts, and the facts are that 164 parks have been identified to have their protection removed, reverted to public land, opened for other land use or private partnerships. Other impacts include closing very busy visitors' centres, discontinuing popular groomed cross-country ski trails, shortening the operating season for many campgrounds, increasing camping and service fees at all sites. Seventeen of the 20 original sites will not be operated temporarily for September 2020.

Albertans are being heard now, and it's important that we keep the pressure up and we keep talking to all MLAs. Clearly, we need to make sure that the parks minister stops and listens to the reality that he has created by his attempt to move ideology ahead of fact, to move his own interest and desire to privatize ahead of the public interest when it comes to Alberta parks. I know that the Member for Banff-Kananaskis . . .

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, and I'll be the first to admit that I am not familiar with every clause that exists in Bill 40. It seems to me that we're currently having a debate that has happened on numerous occasions in this House, particularly in question period, around parks. If, in fact, parks is part of this piece of legislation, perhaps we can proceed to have that debate. If it isn't, which is my sense, I would like for, at least in general and loose terms, members to endeavour to ensure that their remarks are pointed towards the bill as opposed to other issues that have been before the Assembly as well.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: Happily, Mr. Speaker, and I won't even endeavour to be general or loose in my comments in connecting them to the bill. The bill certainly is about forests. Then there are some interesting words in brackets. It is the Forests Amendment Act. I'd be happy to talk about those words in brackets in a moment as well. Certainly, this does, in my experience, relate in that I am responding directly to the misinformation, or disinformation, as one might want to refer to it, just given by the Government House Leader in response to bill debate. I'm happy to continue discussion about the actual bill, but I do think it's important that we do so acknowledging the reality that is being pushed full speed ahead by this Government House Leader.

In terms of forestry, I hope the Government House Leader remembers, but if not, he's probably read it many times in *Hansard*. I proudly grew up in Big Lakes county in Kinuso in northern Alberta. [interjections] Yeah. A couple of people have remembered. Thanks. I have to say that forestry absolutely is a major industry in the north and particularly in my hometown. I spent a lot of time travelling to and from and between Kinuso and Slave Lake on the highway to go swimming. I was obsessed with water then and still love it a lot now in a variety of forms. The pool in Slave Lake was about 50 kilometres away, and we often spent a good chunk of that time behind a logging truck.

When I went back and did my grad studies, I challenged the students that I was working with to explore positive or negative associations with community spaces or public spaces, and they did some amazing work. They said, "Well, we want you to be part of this arts-based project as well, Miss," whose name I can't say because I am a sitting member of the Legislature, and I had a lot of fun, and when I was thinking about some of the most positive experiences as it related to public spaces, it was probably on that

highway with my parents many, many times a week spending time behind logging trucks.

I have to say that I think logging has a deep history and, I hope, a very strong future in this province. Part of why we talk about the importance of parks and protected areas is because it's important that we have a strong forestry industry and we have a strong ecosystem for all of us to live in, to work with, and to enjoy. When I think about my friends who are probably checking their traplines tonight, I am thinking about the fact that they want a rich and robust forest as well as forestry industry.

When I think about the fact that the government continues, specifically the environment minister, to brag about extending leases for public lands beyond what most would say is a generation of somebody who would probably be on that trapline with great enthusiasm without having any consultation, I am not only confused, I'm actually quite disappointed, Mr. Speaker. I think that when I reflect on why I was inspired to seek a nomination and run for office, a big part of that was wanting to work with the community and for the community and not to do things to the community and assume the way that they would respond. For the minister to be so braggadocious in celebrating his more than doubling of the term of the lease I don't think bodes well for that concept of working with the community and for the community.

In terms of employment – what is in the brackets that I want to refer to is what they refer to as: Growing Alberta's Forest Sector. I do hope that we have an opportunity to hear from the minister or other government colleagues in response to how this actually does that, because when we've asked this in technical briefings so far, we haven't gotten a specific answer about projections or estimates or anything that actually has to do with jobs in terms of the sector.

Definitely, I would think that – I do hope that this is about jobs and that this is also about sustainability, and for that reason I would hope that the minister or a designate would happily talk about jobs assessments. When we did ask about them, we were told that there weren't any. Maybe that's changed now, between when this bill was introduced and today, but definitely I think all members are hoping for that information.

In terms of a thought that evaporated earlier about Banff-Kananaskis, I surely know many folks in Banff-Kananaskis and in other beautiful parts of our province who care very deeply about our parks and want to ensure that this government responds and that all MLAs respond in reversing the devastating decisions that have been made to date around moving forward with ideology as opposed to putting people and their priorities at the forefront.

8:20

It is very clear to me that people, whether you live in Banff-Kananaskis or Lesser Slave Lake, want to make sure that we have a good, long-term environment, that we've got opportunities for all of us to have clean drinking water, safe aquifers, opportunities for all of us to enjoy the forests and the economic and social opportunities that exist, as we refer to it, in the bush. It definitely is an opportunity for us to consider some of those opportunities, things that I would have really loved to see in this bill. Maybe there's an opportunity through some amendments, either government or private members' amendments or even opposition amendments.

I would love to see more work done to address the significant softwood lumber disputes that have been engaged on by the President of the United States, somebody who the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry campaigned for very enthusiastically, raised a glass to. That is directly, I would say, attacking the industry that we have here in Alberta and many of the jobs and our economic success that is linked to forestry. I think that the softwood lumber dispute and the liabilities that we're experiencing there and the

potential losses with such a significant trade partner to ourselves are wrong-headed and don't put the people of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake or Lesser Slave Lake or Banff-Kananaskis or any Albertans or Canadians first when it comes to our softwood lumber industry. We are very blessed to have the resource that we do. With that comes a responsibility, I would say, for stewardship and to ensure that we maintain rich forests and good, strong biodiversity in terms of our forests here and specifically the boreal forest as well.

Another area that I would love to see more action from this government on is around the mountain pine beetle. We know that research shows very clear connections between the mountain pine beetle and the impacts of climate change. Again, earlier today we had a member in this House – I kind of miss Richard Starke right now, I have to say – stand in this place and talk about the dominant narrative not being the only narrative. Well, I guess, but I would say that the reality and facts and science say that, absolutely, climate change is real. It's impacting all of us. And I think that it's important that we have a government that acknowledges science.

I saw a quote from Michelle Wolf earlier. Some of you might remember her from the press gallery dinner, I think it's called, that they used to do every year in the United States. Her quote was – and I'll send these to my friends at *Hansard*: when you're in high school, if you don't believe in science, you fail. Of course, science and facts and evidence are foundational to basic knowledge, that we expect all students to have by the time they complete and we give them the blessing to leave high school. To see people question the dominant narrative around science and climate change I think is an injustice to this place and also an injustice to the education system, that we have a responsibility to steward and that presumably many of us in this place completed as part of our K to 12 education.

There also is another question I'd like to raise for the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, and that's specifically as it relates to the discussions with officials. We really appreciate the opportunity to have some engagement on this. One of the things we were told is that a very small percentage – I think it was about 10 per cent – of industry stakeholders said that they weren't in favour of these changes, which is not a significant portion. I have to say that that's pretty astounding support. But I would like to know what the concerns were that that 10 per cent raised – I think it's important for us to know – and what the government did to either address those or why the government isn't responding to the concerns that were raised by industry in this regard. Definitely, I have to say that some of the core pillars that I come to this place with are: a belief in good, strong public health care, education, and good jobs for all Albertans. I know that there are many good jobs in forestry, and I'd like to see that continue to be the case. I think having answers to what those concerns were would definitely behoove us in having this discussion and making the best decision possible when it comes to this specific piece of legislation.

Again, some of the areas I wish the government was addressing, that I think would have significant benefits for jobs: the softwood lumber dispute, that we are experiencing the impacts of, with our biggest trading partner south of the border – perhaps some of that will change in the coming week – and the mountain pine beetle and the impacts that it's having on our forestry sector and the link between it and climate change.

I'd say that one of the best ways we can probably make sustainable forests is to make sure that we are committed to addressing the impacts of climate change and addressing climate change and the causes of climate change. I think that by failing to do so – clearly, there are folks within the government caucus that don't take it seriously – we're not only setting ourselves up for failure in terms of the environment and our own individual connections between the environment and our own livelihoods but

also the folks that we are here standing for and with and that I hope the government had in mind, the nearly 19,000 Albertans who work in the forestry sector directly.

I know that there are also many who work more indirectly. I know that a lot of folks in my hometown spend a good portion of their spring and summer fighting forest fires, on contract, and it's a great way to use some of their farm equipment and other pieces of heavy equipment and machinery that they've purchased for their own purposes for economic purposes to help sustain and diversify their individual incomes for their own operations and for their own families.

I think of those – 18,700 was the last reported number – folks who are directly employed in forestry as well as many who are indirectly employed. When I think about those forestry trucks, again, going on the highway, we know that those folks who are driving those trucks stop somewhere to get gas, stop somewhere to have dinner, and occasionally check into a hotel. Of course, their families take the revenue that they made, and they spend it in their communities, often local communities as well. The spinoffs for revenue from the forestry industry are significant in our province. I believe it's still the third-largest industry currently in our province, so making sure that we find ways to continue to support it and get full benefit from it, including full benefit from our trade and our sale of softwood lumber with the United States, I think would be an important area of focus for this government.

Those are a couple of the things that I wanted to raise. I do sincerely hope that the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and/or his designate will respond to the questions I raised because I think I would like the idea of us passing legislation in this place that's going to help have sustained, long-term opportunities in forestry as well as grow the opportunities for employment for future generations and make sure that our forests are there for all of us to enjoy now and tomorrow.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and the hon. the Government House Leader had the last opportunity to speak under 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you for your fairness and amicable judgment, Mr. Speaker, in allowing me to speak once again under 29(2)(a). I'm very interested in hearing more from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, particularly on the subject of softwood lumber disputes. I know that with her having grown up in a logging community or an area where logging took place, she would have probably been able to set her clock, like most Albertans, to know when the next softwood lumber dispute was coming because it's certainly something that happens on a regular basis. Lumber lobbies in the United States see fit to lobby their U.S. government to create salacious claims, claims they repeatedly lose – I think it's five times in a row – about the unfair practices of Canadian lumber sales into the United States regarding duties and fees. The minister has heralded his legislation in an effort to try to come up with something that he can say that it actually accomplishes when it is really not accomplishing much after 50 years of not being amended in any substantial way. The minister is, I think, scraping small twigs when he ballyhoos that the trade disputes will become much more easily defensible under the softwood lumber negotiations because, in fact, the dues and fees will be published and more publicly available.

8:30

Well, in fact, by his own admission, Mr. Speaker, those dues and fees were, quote: not a state secret already. Those individual organizations who were lobbying their U.S. government to initiate

softwood lumber claims and unfair trade practices claims under the softwood lumber agreement really could care less whether the minister sees fit to publish the dues and fees in a public way, because they're certainly cognizant of those numbers. It's not a practice that is in any way something that the public should be cheering about, saying: gee whiz, we're going to solve the softwood lumber dispute because we made these numbers transparent. They're already there.

The powers that be in the United States, who are lobbying to hurt our Canadian industry because they want their own industry to benefit, really are probably chuckling at this minister's attempt to justify the measure that he made in this bill to make these numbers transparent. It really accomplishes nothing, and it's not a statement that will allow the softwood lumber disputes to be more easily defensible. It may make him sound as though publicly he's laying his cards on the table, but softwood lumber disputes, trade disputes in the United States are knock-down, drag-out affairs which ultimately in the tribunal's decisions we've won, but they certainly take a fair bit of a dogfight.

I'm just wondering if, in the moment or two that we have left, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, in her experience, recalls some of the softwood lumber disputes that affected the logging industry in her area. I know that in every area of the province which has suffered under the softwood lumber disputes between Canada and the United States over many years now, we get dragged through the mud. I think that rather than looking to simply publish a few numbers and suggest that it's going to make the trade disputes more defensible, we should look at a much more comprehensive method of approaching the whole problem with the softwood lumber disputes and trade disputes with the United States in a much more overarching piece of legislation, that this Bill 40 is not.

We had an opportunity here, Mr. Speaker, to really take a deep dive into this Forests Act legislation in the province and examine what we could do over the long term to overhaul the legislation that governs forestry extraction and the forestry industry in Alberta, and this bill fails to do that. It claims there were months of consultation, yet the Alberta Wilderness Association and indigenous people were not on that list.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this evening? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Always a pleasure to get up and speak in this House. It's been a while for me, so I'm really looking forward to being able to share some ideas with all members of the House tonight, especially, with all due respect, through you, of course, as the Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make it absolutely and abundantly clear that here on the opposition side we support modernizing this act, completely, undoubtedly. Regardless of what, you know, the hon. members on the other side of the bench have to say, this is our position on this – and again I stress it – that we support the modernizing of this act and taking real action to be able to create some jobs here in the province of Alberta. I do indeed know that this is the true intention of the government and the cabinet ministers with this bill. I know that that's what they want to do. We are completely in favour of that. We understand that due to COVID and even in pre-COVID times the province was going into an economy that was going to be – at that time we didn't understand the depth of the crisis, but now that we're in the middle of it, we understand it full and well, and we know that we need to get Albertans back to work.

So I hope that the members on the other side keep that in mind when I offer the following statements and suggestions, because, of course, that's what we're here to do as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, to provide alternatives and ways of doing things perhaps just a little bit better. It's up to the government to decide whether they would like to incorporate some of our ideas into their actions, but at the end of the day it is done with no ill intent. In fact, it is done with the intention that we want to be able to serve the people of Alberta and be able to serve them as best we can as we continue to get through this economic crisis. So, again, let's create jobs in Alberta.

However, with this piece of legislation, as has been pointed out by my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford, one of the unfortunate oversights of this government has been to not consult with indigenous people here in the province of Alberta. Now, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford spoke at length about, I would say, our responsibilities under the treaty rights and court decisions that have made it absolutely essential for First Nations people here in the province of Alberta to be consulted on pieces of legislation like this. It is with that intent that I also want to contribute some remarks to the ongoing debate.

Now, as is well known, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has gotten up and spoken in this House and I've gotten up and spoken to this at length before here in this very House with this very government, and it seems like our ideas or our suggestions are not getting through. We've gotten up in this House before, Mr. Speaker, and we spoke about the responsibility and the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that was conducted all over our fine country, when it came to really consulting with indigenous peoples about our shared future as we continue to grow as a province and then as a nation into a true federation, where First Nations people are going to be respected as nations.

You know, this is an idea that has come – well, I would say that it has always been there. But it's something that governments here in the province of Alberta and as well all over this nation and the federal government have not wanted to understand when it comes to acknowledging indigenous people, that were here living on this land before we as settlers came and established our own institutions. You can just look at the history, Mr. Speaker. Our own institutions: we've brought them in, and we've basically trampled every type of institution within – I would even go so far – indigenous cosmological understanding of their relationship to the land, and that was brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

8:40

Their connection to the land is not just a physical one. It's not just a physical one, Mr. Speaker. Their connection to the land is a cultural one and is even a spiritual one, and when this government walks into this Chamber and puts forward a piece of proposed legislation that doesn't even consider this important population within the boundaries of what we call our province – and remember: they want to be spoken to as nations, not just indigenous communities, not just reserve number whatever it is, not just chief and council. The reason why I understand this is because I've had so many opportunities to meet with indigenous people even before becoming elected and being a representative inside of this House.

One thing that we all need to understand is the fact that when you go to indigenous communities, when you speak to the people in indigenous communities, they're not just one homogeneous group of people that all think in one way. You're going to have a wide diversity of people that think in different ways about their community. So not only is it important to consult with the chief and council of these nations; I would even suggest going a little bit further and actually having a consultation with members of the

community as well so that you get a full and holistic understanding of the perspectives that are held by indigenous people, these nations which we have agreed through treaty to recognize and acknowledge, and it's our responsibility to do so because we agreed to this.

Not only was there the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the calls to action, but if we really wanted to reconcile with indigenous communities here in the province of Alberta, then we also have an international document, which is the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. I'm proud to say that while we were in government, we made it a priority of every ministry – of every ministry, Mr. Speaker – to understand how every piece of legislation was going to impact indigenous communities across this province, because we understood that we have a responsibility under the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

This is the reality that we're facing with this government now, Mr. Speaker. We have a piece of legislation. Well, yes, it's true that they consulted with industry, but no First Nations were consulted, no chief and council, no communities. Then here we have our critic for Indigenous Relations and our critic for Agriculture, who have done just that because we made a commitment. We made a commitment that when we were taking the responsibility of being representatives within this House, we were going to acknowledge those two very important documents and not only those two very important documents but then also as it relates under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the rights of indigenous people in participation with the nation that we call Canada.

So the government needs to decide: is it going to take this responsibility seriously or not? We have governments all over Canada, all over the world that have accepted these international agreements. They've done their own truth and reconciliation processes in order to make sure that they're connecting and building towards a future in common with First Nations people and, not only that, understanding the philosophical perception that indigenous people have.

This is what I'm asking this government to please acknowledge. Yes, you can identify them as a political entity, but what I'm asking you to do is to understand that they are not only that, but they have a cultural and spiritual connection to the land. When we go in and we disturb – and, of course, I understand the government. I understand what they're doing. We want to create more jobs. We want to create more jobs for all Albertans, including First Nations people, but we can't do that at the risk of undermining the cultural and spiritual connection that indigenous people have to the land. This is my biggest concern when it comes to this piece of legislation.

I would like to think that the members from cabinet, especially the hon. Government House Leader, would understand and at least perhaps listen to the comments that I have to share here in the House tonight. I can understand that we may be at ideological ends when it comes to how we choose to act in this world and specifically when it comes to indigenous people, but at the same time you cannot undermine how a cultural group identifies itself. This is what is absolutely essential if we want to show respect and dignity to all the people for which our pieces of legislation will impact within the borders of this fine province.

We can't continue to go down that path, that path that does not respect reconciliation, that path that refuses to recognize the rights even though constitutionally they've been recognized already by courts across this land. I'm pleading with the government. I'm pleading with the government and, like, heart to heart; you know me well now, right? I'm pleading with this government to please do the right thing. I don't know. We'll see in terms of debate where we

continue to go, but I think that it would be important for the government to seriously consider this unfortunate oversight which they have made when it comes to this here piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). I recognize the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for that speech and to many of the members of the opposition for their speeches. I do believe that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie spoke earnestly when he said that he does not want to stop the growth of the forestry industry, which is so important in my riding, along with the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who's from not far from my riding in Kinuso as the member pointed out. I believe their sincerity in that, so I will take the olive branch and hopefully respond in the short time I have with my question and comments.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said his deep, sincere desire is that the government sees First Nation communities, indigenous communities as not only political but also cultural and spiritual communities as well. Well, I would agree one hundred per cent, Mr. Speaker, that that is true. He talked about the dignity and respect that they deserve. I would agree. I live in these communities in amongst the north, in the forestry part of the province in the rural north. The truth is this. It's not so easy to say: this is a First Nations' interest, and this is the interest of the others. I think that that is a mistake.

8:50

I sincerely plead and ask the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to come up and to speak to individuals who work at places like West Fraser, Mercer, Boucher Bros., Tolko, Norbord, La Crête Sawmills, Garden River Logging, Pineridge Logging, evergreen logging, Crestview, and meet with the First Nation individuals who work at these places, who depend for their livelihood, for their shelter, for their safety, for their future, and for their family on that industry thriving and understand that those individuals, those First Nation individuals who work at these places are pleading with members of the Official Opposition, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, to not in their name evoke First Nations as a reason to hold this back. It's in their name that you should be working towards it.

It's because of the important plight of finding growth and prosperity in our First Nation communities that it's so important that we move this legislation forward. It is so important that the members opposite take seriously the desire of the First Nation communities where I live, in the forestry communities, and make sure that those communities and those individuals are ones that are looked after, because the primary concern that they have is: can they get a job? It's not so different from any other Albertan. Let's not put them into a box and make them special. Let's not make it something where there's a special case for these individuals. Every single First Nation individual I meet has pride, respect, and dignity, as the member opposite mentioned. They have that. It can't be taken from them. What they don't want is to be looked down upon. What they don't want is to be a special set of individuals. What they want is to say: I want that job, too. They're incredibly proud of the forestry industry in which they work, the most sustainable resource industry in the province.

I see some members opposite are looking confused. I'm happy to engage with them sincerely afterwards, but the truth is that First Nation members in my riding love the forestry industry, want to see bills like this passed, want to see opportunities for them and their families because they end up in a spot where there are no

opportunities, where there's nothing but opportunities shut down every direction they turn. That is where communities, wherever you're from in the province, go down dark directions, and they find themselves struggling with difficulties of addiction, difficulties with social problems and domestic abuse, which are tragedies we all want to avoid.

The best thing we can do is make sure that there's a thriving, growing, sustainable economic future for our First Nation communities in the province. Members opposite, like the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, listed things that they're against, and I would agree – mountain pine beetle, forest fires, softwood lumber dispute – and listed things that the individuals are for: biodiversity, healthy forests, good jobs. That sounds a lot like what I see when I talk to folks. It sounds a lot like the same things that First Nation individuals say when they speak to me. There's common ground here, Mr. Speaker, that we can find, and the truth is that if we can see the value of the jobs that this bill, in the amendments that it makes to the act, the value that it provides for individuals in my communities, I think that we'll be further ahead than we would be otherwise.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

I see the hon. Government House Leader. Is he speaking to the main bill?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yes, to the main bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the bill. Let me start off by thanking the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry for this important piece of legislation. Again, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre depends on the forestry industry significantly. Two sawmills in my constituency, and we're proud of the important work they do.

I did listen with interest to the – I think, Mr. Speaker, he's now the deputy House leader. I don't know. I can't keep track of the changes over there at the moment. Maybe deputy whip? Anyways . . .

Ms Hoffman: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you very much.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie in his comments in regards to indigenous consultation – I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I find that quite rich coming from a member who was a member of the NDP when they were in government two years ago, who completely and utterly abandoned the four First Nation communities inside my constituency, where their government was universally condemned by my friends in the O'Chiese Nation, the Sunchild Nation, the Smallboy Camp, and the Big Horn.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, as you know, the NDP brought in a plan that they had the nerve to name the Bighorn and not even go and visit with the Big Horn nation, right in the middle of where they're located. All four of those First Nation communities are located right in the area that the NDP tried to shut access to to all Albertans, including those four First Nation communities.

Now, I see the former indigenous affairs minister here, Mr. Speaker, this evening. It's always a pleasure to see and interact with the hon. member. But while he was the indigenous affairs minister, during that moment, one of the things that those four First Nation communities were most offended by is he would not even drive out there to see what was going on, wouldn't even consult with them.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the day before the NDP tried to announce that plan, I was at the Big Horn nation, at their school, and Alberta Environment and Parks was there presenting on behalf of the then

NDP government their plan for an area that the Big Horn had lived in since the beginning of time. Do you know when the NDP were going to release the plan? The next morning. Was the minister there? Was there an elected NDP member there? No.

The Sunchild, the O'Chiese, the Smallboy camp, and the Big Horn all rejected . . .

Mr. Feehan: The Smallboy Camp and the Big Horn are not nations.

Mr. Jason Nixon: See, Mr. Speaker? The hon. former indigenous affairs minister says the Big Horn is not a nation. I can tell you this: they're a First Nation community that I'm very proud are part of the constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. They certainly had a right – well, they are part of a broader nation; you are correct. They live in the community. It is their traditional lands. Does the hon. member think they did not need to be consulted about a plan? [interjections]

The Speaker: If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford wants to join in the debate, as I reminded the Government House Leader earlier, he'll have the opportunity under Standing Order 29(2)(a) or many other times this evening, so I encourage him to do that when he is standing, not in a sedentary position.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point is that for that hon. member and for the NDP to try to imply in any way that they did more First Nation consultation is quite rich. One of the very first things that the now Premier of Alberta did was reinstate a meeting that all other Premiers used to do but was stopped by the now Leader of the Official Opposition when she was Premier, the member for Edmonton-Strathcona – stopped by the NDP, and that was to bring all the chiefs in the province to Government House to meet with cabinet.

Now, I was at that meeting, Mr. Speaker, as a member of cabinet, and I can tell you that the very first thing the chiefs said was: thank you for redoing this meeting; we don't know why the NDP stopped this meeting or why the NDP would not meet with us. Maybe they didn't want to meet with them. Maybe they didn't want to hear, just like they didn't want to hear from the Big Horn, the O'Chiese, the Sunchild, or the Smallboy camp on what was taking place inside of the Bighorn. They thanked us for that.

You know, the second thing that happened at that meeting was the Sunchild, the O'Chiese, and the Big Horn said: thank you for stopping the secret plan the NDP tried to do to shut us out of our own backyard. How's that for indigenous consultation? They named the plan after one of the communities and didn't even go see them. They didn't even go see them. They have no way that they can lecture on the community.

The hon. member for . . .

Ms Hoffman: Edmonton-Glenora?

Mr. Jason Nixon: No, not Edmonton-Glenora, but we can get to that one in a minute.

We'll start with Edmonton-Gold Bar. He, as far as I'm aware, has never went and met with the Piikani, but he stands in this House every day and condemns their call to be able to have success for their nation, to be able to create jobs on their nation, and the fact that they want to work with metallurgical coal on their traditional lands. Never been there, Mr. Speaker. I invite him. I think he should go. Call the chief. The chief was a former RCMP officer in Sundre and Olds; you may know the chief. He was an excellent member of our community. Certainly, while he was a law enforcement officer, I'd meet with the chief quite often. Never have I ever heard of the

NDP's environment critic going down there, but he can stand up in this House each and every day and call out shutting down the project the Piikani needs for their very nation. How's that for consultation? Seems the NDP only wants to consult with First Nation communities if they're going to say what the NDP wants them to say.

9:00

You know what else they did, Mr. Speaker, to the Sunchild, the O'Chiese, the Big Horn, and the Smallboy Camp – can't forget that – when those communities spoke up against the NDP not consulting them on a plan that would impact their traditional lands? Do you know what the NDP did? They accused people of threatening people at the so-called consultations in Rocky Mountain House and Sundre, claimed there was an RCMP investigation, but it turned out there was not. They got caught on that, caught with that. There was no RCMP investigation. That was their response when four First Nation communities said: hey, we have not been consulted, and we do not agree with this plan. It was to accuse those communities of being violent to government officials, that it was too unsafe to have consultations. Shame on them. And they got caught. Remember, it turned out there was no RCMP investigation.

I remember when the NDP government said that, Mr. Speaker. I remember it very clearly. I was quite shocked and alarmed because I had been to both of those meetings. I never saw any trouble happening. I called up right away to the sergeant of the RCMP in Rocky Mountain House. I have breakfast with him on a regular basis. I said: "Hey, what's going on? Did something take place that I didn't see or hear about in the parking lot?" He happened to be – get this – having breakfast with the sergeant in Sundre at the same time, so I managed to get both of them on one phone call, and they said: we have no idea what the NDP are talking about. It was completely and utterly made up. Of course, famously, the then Alberta environment minister got caught and had to apologize, Mr. Speaker, for making up a fake RCMP investigation. That is the length that the NDP would go to to avoid consulting with First Nation communities who disagree with them. That's the length they would go.

As the hon. Member for Peace River said this evening, First Nation communities, including the ones that I represent, depend on the forestry industry. They do. They depend on the forestry industry. They support the forestry industry. They recognize that sustainable forestry is actually important for the environment, the beautiful landscapes that you all love to come and see when you come to visit my constituency, when you come and vacation inside my beautiful constituency, Mr. Speaker. I know many of the hon. members across the way do because they talk to me often about it when they come and visit.

The David Thompson corridor: we've known for 200 and some years, Mr. Speaker, that it's one of the most beautiful corridors, certainly, inside the province. I know you grew up there, Mr. Speaker. You know how beautiful it is up in that corridor. Do you know what created that landscape? Fire and grazing, and we simulate that to this day, the buffalo grazing, through cattle grazing off much of the eastern slopes. We also can simulate that through sustainable logging, a very environmentally friendly practice, very important for ungulates and other animals that utilize areas that have been cut. It's important that you're able to do that in a sustainable way, of course, to protect watersheds and the aquifer. There are rules in place to make sure that happens, but you need to do it, actually, to be able to create and still make sure that those landscapes can remain beautiful for future generations.

You, certainly, Mr. Speaker, cannot speak against creating jobs for First Nation communities by saying that the government did not consult with First Nation communities even though they did. I can

tell you that I spoke to two of my First Nation communities just the other day in regard to this bill, and they certainly support this.

It's shocking. Again, I actually had kind of forgotten about the fact that they named their plan to shut down my backyard after – sorry – one of our indigenous communities, Mr. Speaker, the Big Horn without talking to them, by the way. Just named this plan the Bighorn.

I had forgotten that they had not consulted them, but the other day, when I was talking to them about this very bill, Mr. Speaker, you know what they reminded me of? The fact that the NDP never consulted them. In fact, from their perspective, they said that the NDP never consulted them on anything. I actually assumed that the then indigenous affairs minister would have taken the time. That was major news at the time. It was a signature policy of the then government. To find out that the minister of the day responsible for First Nation relationships for the government couldn't even be bothered to drive to Rocky Mountain House – I drive there every week. It ain't that long of a drive. Maybe they were still waiting, at the time, for somebody like the Minister of Justice now to be able to give them a bus. At the time maybe what we should have done is that we should have got a bus to get the minister of environment and the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, to make them be able to take the time to be able to come and consult.

Now, I'm going to sit down in a moment, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I think I may adjourn debate in a moment. I haven't decided what I'm going to do with that. But what you will notice is that not one of those NDP members is going to stand up and defend that. They're not. They know they didn't go there. They know they made up a fake RCMP investigation, insulted all those communities because they didn't want those communities to be heard. That's what they did. The record is clear. That's what they did to the First Nation communities inside my constituency.

It's quite appalling, Mr. Speaker, and they sit inside the Chamber and smirk about it today. They have the nerve to say that this government doesn't consult with indigenous communities and that they did. They didn't. They couldn't even – think about this. They stopped a tradition that has gone on inside this province for basically a century, since Confederation, for cabinet to meet with the chiefs. That's their legacy. They're the only government, as far as I know, that said: we won't meet with the chiefs. They can't come up there because they want to just select chiefs that they want to meet with. They don't want to put up and talk about indigenous communities that may disagree with the NDP philosophy.

I mean, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford: has he gone down to the Piikani since he's been in opposition? Has he ever stood in this House and talked about the importance of the project that they're trying to get built inside their community and how it would impact our friends the Piikani? When was the last time he met with the chief to talk about forestry projects and mining projects that are important to the Piikani? Not recently, Mr. Speaker. Not recently, because they only want to consult with chiefs and indigenous people when they think that the communities are going to say what they want them to say.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they're not always going to say that. They're our partners, and they're going to have different opinions, but they certainly deserve the respect of being consulted with. Hopefully, the opposition will learn from their mistakes when they were in government and actually take some time to talk to some chiefs. In fact, I want them to have so much time to be able to think about that that I think I will adjourn debate on this bill to give them more time to think about that. Hopefully, when we come back on that, they'll be able to apologize to the indigenous communities of this province.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment October 28: Mr. Bilous speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are debating Bill 35. I believe that we are on amendment REF1. Is there anyone else that would like to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 35. After listening to the fairy story from across the way there, it's nice to move on to some reasonable debate.

I think that we need to just lay out for a few moments here what Bill 35 is. It's essentially just a doubling down on failure, a repeating of history that is remarkably poorly thought out, demonstrably a failure in terms of all its objectives, and something that anybody else who were to review would say: why in heaven's name are you repeating something that was so completely disastrous the first time you did it that you would want to do it not only again but faster and more? Let's just do a quick review about how the degree to which this plan that apparently was put together by the UCP has been a complete failure.

We notice that, after the implementation of their plan, immediately there was a loss of about 50,000 jobs in the province of Alberta. There was a dramatic drop in the GDP. The Conference Board of Canada said that Alberta's GDP at this point will drop by approximately 11.3 per cent this year while next door it was only dropping by 5.5 during the COVID crisis. It's interesting that this government's plan has actually made things twice as bad as our neighbour, who has approximately the same population as we do.

9:10

I notice that ATB Financial says that capital spending on oil and gas attraction is expected to fall by about 30 per cent, so the very thing that they tend to focus on almost exclusively and solely is demonstrated to be a complete disaster. I notice that RBC says that it's “the most severe the province has ever experienced in a single year and the largest in Canada,” so not only is it the worst in history, but it's the worst under present governments in Canada. Comparatively speaking, this government has failed on all the measures that they themselves have purported to want to achieve.

What this is: really, it's a plan to give \$4.7 billion away to already-profitable corporations without ever asking those corporations to make a commitment to create jobs in this country, let alone in this province. As a result, we saw exactly that. We saw corporations leave, take the money, pocket the money, buy back their own shares – in other words, increase their already-profitable profit line – and use it to take their investment dollars and invest in other jurisdictions, including in the States, including moving whole companies' headquarters down into the States. That's the plan. That's been the outcome of the plan that they have. That's been the failure they have on their own measures. They have completely

failed to achieve the outcomes that they set out to achieve. Now what they're saying is: we did such a great job of driving down GDP and getting rid of jobs that we're going to try to do it some more. It seems, you know, quite ridiculous that the government is in this place again.

We know that they have a very narrow range of friends in society who they wish to enrich through their plans and that they really failed to look at the alternatives that are available. They have taken time to get rid of all of the very productive programs that were put in place by the previous government. They have cut scientific research. They cut, for example, the scientific research and experimental development credit. They have cut tech development in this modern age when high-tech, when Internet – when interactive digital media is one of the fastest growing economic engines in the world, they chose to cut the interactive digital media tax credit, so we have companies, some of whom started right here in Edmonton and have become world-renowned, telling us that without those credits, they won't be able to keep their corporations here in Alberta because they're receiving better deals elsewhere in the world. We know that they cut the Alberta investor tax credit. We know they cut the Alberta capital investment tax credit.

They have gone, in every way possible, to take all of the money that they have and put it into a single basket, and having failed in doing that the first time, they're going to repeat it. It's very discouraging to see this kind of an economic plan for Alberta, a plan which fails in most of its core objectives and fails to do what is most needed now here in the province of Alberta.

It was with almost embarrassment that I listened to the Finance minister earlier today explain with joy that almost 65 per cent of the jobs that he has lost have come back. That's his measure of success: I'm almost back, 65 per cent, to where I should have been. You know, if that's your measure of success, you really have a long way to go. Most people would say that that's not 65 per cent success; that's 35 per cent failure and more, because those jobs were lost for a period of time.

You know, I'm very concerned that this is a government that worries about the number of jobs but doesn't do anything to actually help create them, doesn't work with the new industries that are coming up, doesn't expand the economy to try to ensure that we can rely on new sources of income over the years and new places for people to work: the high-tech sector, medical research sectors, manufacturing. All of these pieces that we were investing in they took the money away from, and now they're wondering why things aren't going very well. Now they're concerned that this economy is the worst it's ever been in its history, and do they take any responsibility for it? No. They spin the wheel of blame, and they blame whoever it is that they can possibly blame. They blame the previous government, they blame COVID, they blame international governments . . . [interjection] Sorry?

Ms Hoffman: They blame us.

Mr. Feehan: And they blame all Albertans. I think it would be really nice if they just took some time to take responsibility, to sit down and actually look at the numbers, the numbers that are being given by all of these major international finance organizations, who are saying to us: we are simply not going to invest in what it is you want us to invest in unless you have robust climate change programs, unless you have robust environmental programs, unless you have world-class educational institutions that can ensure we have highly trained, highly qualified people to hire when we come into your jurisdiction. That's what the international markets are saying. That's what the investors are saying. That's what the former governor of the Bank of Canada is saying. People with all of the

financial expertise and experience that you could possibly hope for are giving you advice to move in a direction that you are refusing to move in. It's the worst case of stubbornness, ideological rigidity that I have seen in my whole life, and it's very disappointing to see that happen.

What we need is a plan that actually is focused on jobs, not on profit. Profit is important, but it is a mechanism. It is a means to an end; it is not the end in and of itself. We can have massive amounts of profit, but if it doesn't produce any jobs for people, it's not very useful, not very helpful. And that's what we've been seeing in North America for the last 30 years because of the type of trickle-down economic philosophical position that has been taken by this government. It's been demonstrated time and time again in places like Kansas and throughout the United States: it just doesn't work.

The evidence has been pursued, the evidence has been written up, and the evidence has been articulated that you can in fact shuffle money from the hands of the many into the hands of the few, and you can build up the amount of money that actually exists, the wealth that exists in a few small pockets, and that you can see even things like GDP rise with no job growth if you do it this way. That's the problem, that they're only counting dollars; they're not counting people.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

If they were to count people instead, they would say: has the evidence shown that this type of trickle-down economics actually leads to the average person having a better life than they did a year ago, 10 years ago, or in the previous generation? The evidence is that that's not what's been happening when these types of policies are brought in, that we're not seeing job growth rising with the wealth accumulation. We're seeing the biggest split that's ever been recorded statistically in the history of economics in North America. What that means is that some people certainly are going to become rich. Some people are certainly going to have untold amounts of wealth, but the average person's buying power has gone up almost nothing in the last 10 or 15 years under those kinds of economic policies.

9:20

What we need instead is a plan that's focused on jobs, not on wealth accumulation, that we use our wealth to ensure that people have employment and that the money that is generated when we have wealth increases is actually available to the average citizen in society. That's something that this government has utterly failed to do, as evidenced by the statements from all of these international finance organizations. We need to make sure that the gains we get in this province are equitable in their distribution in society; that is, if you are a tradesperson, if you are a manufacturer, if you are in the retail sector, you see your economy rise as well, that the benefits of having Alberta be successful arrive on your doorstep, not just on the doorsteps of the few international corporations that are able to draw the money together and create a private, personal pile of wealth. My son refers to it as the dragon form of economy: gather all the wealth you possibly can, put it together, and sit on it like a dragon's hoard. It's really an unacceptable form of economic planning.

The other thing we need to do besides jobs and equity is that we need to make sure that we have a plan that is focused on diversification, that is as widely built as possible so that when one area of the economy does dip, because they do, for reasons that are outside of our control, we can rely on other areas. We must focus on the role of government and the public sector in supporting the growth of the private sector. We know from the history of the last number of years that most of the major advancements, like the

Internet and that kind of technology, have all been produced through government research and government funds or through major institutions funded by governments, like universities, all of which have been cut by this government.

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

Mr. Dach: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had plenty more to say, and there'll be opportunities for him to do so. Indeed, I hope to hear the member speak to a number of the issues he brought up on numerous occasions in this House as we proceed with debate on this piece of legislation.

I'm wondering if indeed the member wished to continue speaking about some of the initiatives regarding consultation that the NDP caucus is involving itself in in an effort to laser focus our attention on the real, immediate needs of Albertans, because, Mr. Speaker, the piece of legislation before us, that we are asking be referred to committee to allow consultation to take place, is one that really is out of step with where the Alberta population is. We're talking about the acceleration of a corporate tax cut at a time when individual families are looking to fill their fridge next week, wondering if indeed they're going to have one job at all left in the family.

I think that the member might want to bring to mind a website called albertasfuture.ca, where individuals can go to see what the Alberta opposition NDP caucus is doing to co-ordinate a debate and invite Albertans to come and share their ideas so that we can build an economy that meets their needs in a way that is specific to the realities of today, not to go forward with this \$4.7 billion tax cut acceleration, that will end up doing nothing for the immediate needs of Albertans. I'd like to hear the member's comments on that topic.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for reminding me that I really should be inviting all those of you watching and all the citizens of Alberta to go to albertasfuture.ca to participate in our conversations around diversifying and expanding the economy in ways that matter to you. I think that it's important that you participate in this project, and we've certainly provided an opportunity for you to do that.

Right now you can go online and you can see our hydrogen paper, how we will help the oil and gas industry to begin to make the transition into modern and future-oriented products. You can also see how we've looked at the fact that — ensuring that women continue to be a major part of the economy and get back into work after the COVID recession is important by implementing a very comprehensive child care policy that will ensure that women don't end up suffering from this process through the limitation that's imposed by not having child care. We know, of course, that while child care is a responsibility of both men and women, women tend to take that responsibility on much more substantially than men do overall and that much more often it's women who make the choice, of course, because that is a choice they can make, to not go back to work if they don't have child care. We want to make sure that if they choose to go back, they do have child care available, that it is at a cost that they can afford, and that makes returning to the workforce profitable for them.

We ask you to go to albertasfuture.ca to have a part in our expansive conversation about diversifying our economy, about growing the future, not returning to the past, not wishing and hoping for an economy that was from the 1970s or 1980s or 1990s but, rather, for an economy which is beginning now and will build, if it

is supported by government, into the future over the next generation to ensure that there's work for Albertans, work that understands what . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1. Are there any other members who wish to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the referral of the motion to committee. As I mentioned in previous comments, I believe very strongly that this legislation is totally out of step with the times we're in, and I think that referral to a committee is an opportunity for Albertans to come forward and make it clear to the government that they have other concerns in mind beyond the limited measures in this bill, which would simply accelerate a corporate tax cut which has shown to be ineffective in achieving its goals of creating employment in this province so far.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In effect, Mr. Speaker, it's a piece of legislation that Albertans are scratching their heads about, wondering why the government would see fit right now to continue with a tax cut measure that's had no job-creation effect in its first rendition, yet they're doubling down on it to try to beat a dead horse into life again. Albertans are not in any way, shape, or form impressed with this pattern of dogma that the government is intent on continuing. I listen to radio accounts. Whether you're looking at social media or talking to constituents who call or e-mail the office – many family members of many members of this Legislature will have their own stories to tell, I'm sure, regarding the difficulties that families are going through, the stresses that they're under. There are reports every day about, for example, the amount of stress that teachers not only in Alberta but right across the country are under, to the near breaking point, Mr. Speaker, where it's difficult to find substitute teachers to replace those who are finding themselves needing time off to relieve their stress.

9:30

That's the type of thing that's occurring right now, Mr. Speaker, in this province and across the country. Yet the focus of this government, in an effort to create jobs, they say, is to reduce the corporate tax rate and implement a measure that has been a failure to this point. It's way off base as to where the mindset of the province is. People are not interested in looking at giving away \$4.7 billion to a corporation. They're interested in finding out what else \$4.7 billion might actually buy. How many added classroom spaces might that buy in order to give greater space between students in classrooms and allow a greater degree of safety in classes? How many educational assistants might that employ to take the stress load off teachers within the classroom or to add to those individuals who might be able to help students studying at home rather than having parents who can afford it seek out private instruction for their children if indeed their budget allows that to take place?

There are numerous examples, Mr. Speaker, as to why this bill should be referred to committee to allow Albertans to really discuss with the government directly and express themselves directly in a way that perhaps the government might hear because up to this point they have – the comments of Albertans, the desires of Albertans to have this government take a leadership role in recognizing how deeply this pandemic is affecting families and taking into account the hardships that exist and focusing the attention of their government in a very direct and pointed way on assisting with the immediate needs of Alberta families, of Alberta individuals, and workers in this province as well. Those immediate

needs are very demanding. They're super stressful. They're something we hear about daily in news accounts and on the Internet. People are talking with each other if they happen to be fortunate to still be working. Those conversations take place beside the water cooler.

Wherever they happen to still be able to meet, Mr. Speaker, people will share their concerns about how their families are going to cope in the next while. You know, the pillow talk between partners and spouses happens to be about survival right now. While the children may be sleeping, the parents and partners of those children are having serious discussions about what their options are. If, for example, the landlord decides to pull the plug, where in the world are they going to rent? Is there another family member they could bunk in with? Are they going to end up being homeless? I mean, we already have hundreds of people homeless in both Calgary and Edmonton, camp communities, tent communities that this provincial government has seen fit to allow and accept as a regular course of events, yet mayors of both those cities are practically begging the province to take responsibility to house these individuals in more permanent settings. They've taken it upon themselves to provide a safety net in renting hotel rooms, and those arrangements are ongoing; for example, at the Convention Centre in Edmonton.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The provincial government has been sorely lacking in its response to the pandemic consequences that we're facing right now in this province. There had better be a much higher degree of leadership and consultation and actual communication, Mr. Speaker, with Albertans from this government because this government is losing the trust of Albertans. People are losing faith in the ability of this government to handle the tragic consequences of the pandemic that we're facing right now and the economic downturn that faces this province. Consequently, the question that people are asking and they're starting to talk about is the actual competence of this government, its ability to lead, its ability to govern, to make decisions that benefit their families. They see a real failure of leadership when it comes to all types of issues with respect to the ability of families to survive in this province right now.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, we have launched albertasfuture.ca, a website to which Albertans can go and engage with us as the Official Opposition in Alberta to let us know exactly what their needs are on any number of fronts that Albertans are concerned with right now, and that can be anything from child care to food requirements to schooling to health and safety concerns. You name it, there's going to be consultation availability with people like myself, engaged in remote sessions on Zoom meetings, and we're looking forward to in the very near future hearing about the agriculture and forestry concerns of Albertans. We are in the middle of debate on a bill that supposedly modernizes the forestry act during a time frame when, you know, it hasn't been modernized for over 50 years, and the government is falling short even on that.

My personal view and what I've been told by my constituents and that I hear loudly no matter what form of media a person happens to watch is that people of this province want their government to be absolutely laser focused on their immediate needs. You know, there's a pervading concern and an envelope of priorities that is pretty small right now. People's worlds have shrunk, and it's for good reason, Mr. Speaker, because they're worried about today, tomorrow, and next week, not necessarily what \$4.7 billion in a tax giveaway might do for a particular corporation in terms of trickle-down jobs, which has certainly borne no fruit so far, not worried about wanting to perhaps double down on that effort and accelerate the tax cuts for a plan that's been shown to have failed. They're scratching their heads and saying, "Look, at \$4.7 billion that's a lot

of money that could be invested right now to help families get over this hump,” families and businesses, I might add, Mr. Speaker, who are really looking to survive the pandemic downturn in this economy.

They’re looking to have the government perhaps look at some type of a rental bridge. Probably the best way to do that would be to put money right in the pockets of the renters so that they can indeed afford to pay the rent that their landlords demand. Landlords need to pay mortgages. We all recognize that. Putting the money in the hands of the tenants so that they can get through this period would be one way of spending a portion of that \$4.7 billion to ensure that we don’t end up with a homeless population that’s going to be occupying more and more of our vacant hotels.

9:40

So the intent of the referral, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that Albertans have another venue to really ask this government that it heeds the direction they wanted to go in. That’s the same type of approach that we’re using with our website albertasfuture.ca so that Albertans can come forward in a very open way and feel that their views are invited and welcomed so that they can be incorporated into our economic plan to lead us beyond the pandemic and out of the doldrums that we’re in in a way that is focused on the current needs of Albertans.

For example, in terms of child care, Mr. Speaker, we know that in order for a workforce to be back to work, child care is an essential element of that. Women and men who have children have to have the affordable child care available for them otherwise they cannot afford to become part of the workforce, and that’s been shown. The actual rate of return on investment for affordable child care is about six times the government dollar spent. It grows your economy.

There’s been very much evidence recently that women have been most hard hit as far as the loss of jobs, and they are the last ones to be able to recover those jobs over time. The big part of that difficulty is that child care is not available in an affordable way, and that’s something that we want Albertans to tell us about very clearly through our website albertasfuture.ca and also by involving themselves and engaging themselves in some of the Zoom meetings with our critics, including myself and Agriculture and Forestry, in the upcoming weeks and months. That will allow us to build a platform of economic goals and programs that really reflect the time that we happen to be in.

This is a historic time in our lives and the lives of the province, the country, and the world. There are certain simple things that we can do to help each other, and I think Albertans are wanting to tell us things that they feel. Like, they see recent examples where there’s been a patchwork quilt, Mr. Speaker, of rules and regulations set by municipalities because the government has downloaded and devolved the authority to municipalities to handle some major, significant components of our effort to control a pandemic, one of them being mask wearing.

Now, one would ask: why? Why, indeed. Wouldn’t the province set parameters that could be implemented when certain thresholds were met in any municipality rather than devolving that responsibility to the municipalities and forcing those municipalities to suffer a local divisive debate when, in fact, it’s well known that mask wearing is a very effective means of controlling the spread of the pandemic? We’re seeing that when certain thresholds are being met, various municipalities are adopting different hodge-podge regulations.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I see 29(2)(a) is slightly popular this evening.

I see the hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for all of the discussion and conversations this evening around this. I just wanted to start off my comments with saying that I feel so blessed every single day to be in this province. I look around at what we’re able to create, even under these incredibly difficult circumstances.

One of the things that gives me so much hope is not only the fact that we get to be in here to discuss these things but also to hear ministers like the minister of jobs and innovation talk about the fact that we’ve created jobs during this pandemic, that the tech and innovation sector is just taking everything forward and that there are so many opportunities. It’s one of the reasons that it was really important for us, I know especially in our ministry, to work with the Minister of Advanced Education to bring forward scholarships in STEM, Mr. Speaker, because we can see that this is a blossoming and growing sector that has the opportunity to do what we all talk about, diversification within our province, things that actually are already happening without even the government’s help.

I just wanted to mention a few things. I feel badly when I hear some of the members opposite speak about wealth creation. This province was built on wealth creation, but I would also like to mention that we have 26,000 nonprofits in this province. Who do you think funds those, Mr. Speaker? It’s not just government. We are definitely a partner and feel very honoured to make partnerships with those, but those nonprofits, the civil society, that contributes hugely to the well-being and the social fabric of this province, are funded by the wealth creators that that opposition basically said are accumulating and sitting on and hoarding wealth.

This province per capita gives more than anywhere else in Canada. Our wealth creators, the capitalists, the job creators in this province, per capita give more in donations and nonprofit support than anywhere else in Canada. The people that the members opposite were just speaking about – and I hope that Albertans are watching tonight. I hope they heard some of the members from the NDP and how they spoke about average, everyday Albertans who have risked absolutely everything – their capital, their homes, every dollar in their bank account – to create businesses to, heaven forbid, have a profit. Then they go and not only are they happy to donate money to social programs, but they volunteer their hours, and they participate in their local charities, whether that’s food banks or shelters or flood mitigation or whatever it is. That is the spirit of Albertans. To suggest that the average Albertan cares about creating a profit, which, I might add, goes into the GDP of this province and helps to support the public sector, is absolutely ludicrous and so short sighted.

I hope that people are listening to this tonight. I hope that they listened to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who basically called every Albertan who’s a small-business person who’s trying to get a profit or the corporations that helped to build this province, including oil and gas, manufacturing, and agriculture – I hope that Albertans are listening tonight to the NDP, who just called them wealth grabbers. I hope that every single person who is in the public sector listened to that tonight, because all of us who are funded in the public sector know that that is based on the fact that we have a private sector in this province.

Anybody who understands – they talk about trickle-down economics and all of this. When the opposition was in government, we were in a structural deficit, and instead of encouraging people to go out and spend money, which is absolutely imperative in a structural deficit, they added a carbon tax. They increased business taxes. They made it difficult for small businesses to even get ahead

at that time, including attacking small businesses and putting the names of actual small businesses into their comms plans and attacking actual people. These are their small businesses, Mr. Speaker, who are trying to make a profit, not only to be able to take care of their families but, to the NDP's point, for child care and to make sure to contribute to that, so in partnership.

I have to say that the Minister of Children's Services has done a phenomenal job taking a look at what is necessary for child care in this province and actually giving parents choice where it is necessary. Here's to all of the people who make a profit. Keep going.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen for debate on REF1.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to get up and speak to the referral motion that's before us with regard to Bill 35, that the tax statutes act be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that a reduction in the corporate income tax rate that rewards foreign shareholders is an ineffective strategy to create jobs relative to the alternatives.

This bill needs a lot more work, Mr. Speaker. I think a referral to the Resource Stewardship Committee will give every member of that committee – I note that the majority of members on that committee are UCP members – will give all members the opportunity to weigh in on the tax statutes amendment that's before us.

9:50

Everyone here can't be satisfied with the massive job losses that are in this province. Many of those tens and tens of thousands of unemployed Albertans are in each of our communities. We know them. They're our neighbours. They're people down the street. They're people we know from church or social groups. We need to do more as legislators to weigh in on how to repair our economy. Let's bring it right down to brass tacks: not how to repair our economy but how to help those people who are unemployed in our communities, that we know, find ways to get back into the workforce. That's what people need. They need to get back to work.

The Finance minister's only idea, if you look at Bill 35, is to bring something relatively similar to what was an idea that the previous NDP government had on the books and to start that up. His continuing idea, as my friend here has just talked about, is to speed up a reduction in corporate income taxes. I'd just remind people that we're at 300,000 unemployed individuals in this province. That's with the presence of the tax reduction being in place that was identified in the UCP platform and that was also brought in soon after they were elected. I don't think anyone can judge that tax cut as being successful. It's failed miserably. It's led to the escape of money to foreign nationals, and it hasn't created jobs in this province. It's created jobs, but they're not here.

So the Minister of Finance gets up and now says that this is a long game that he's playing, that this is a way to address Alberta's needs for the long term. It's interesting that the narrative now is that it's a long game, because I remember that when it was first talked about by the Premier and the Finance minister and probably every MLA on the government side when they went back to their communities, they talked about how it would immediately spur investment in this province, how it would attract investment to this province. The Premier talked about, when it was first introduced, in the middle of '19, having talked to banks, the six big banks, and that one of them was very interested in moving here as a result of the corporate tax cut and how it was a shot in the arm, a shot across the bow, that all

other provinces and states will stand up and take notice and that companies will come here because taxes were now the lowest in Canada.

Those claims, numerous as they are, have not turned out to be realized. The claims of immediately sparking this investment: now the Finance minister is not saying "immediately"; he's saying that it's a long game, and he's setting this province up for the long-term future success. So you see, Mr. Speaker, how I think that this should be referred so that others can have an opportunity to bring their wisdom, their knowledge to the table.

The Finance minister has failed at creating an environment in this province which investment is attracted to, and he's not collecting taxes. We know that that \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway has come at a cost for many people in this province. Regular working people have been laid off in this province to pay for that \$4.7 billion tax giveaway. We know that 20,000 education assistant jobs, public servants, people working for the public service and school boards, have been laid off. Their jobs have ended, more than 20,000 of them, to pay for that \$4.7 billion. We know that the plan is to cut 11,000 public service jobs and see some of those go to the private sector to pay for that \$4.7 billion tax giveaway. We know that other ministers here have cut their staffs. We know that scientists in Agriculture and Forestry are being let go from their jobs.

We know that municipalities around the province are receiving less from this government, and they're being downloaded upon to pay for the \$4.7 billion tax cut, that hasn't created jobs, hasn't attracted companies to this province, and hasn't attracted investment to this province. So why should this Legislature not take a look at what the Finance minister is doing, not have an opportunity to say: "That policy is a failed fiscal policy. That's a failed tax policy. Let's put our heads together and come up with something that's better for this province?"

What was better for this province – and I'm glad to see that the government has taken some of the things that we were doing – was to look at tech credits for that industry. I'm glad that that's going to be back on the table. What was better for this province is to actually stimulate our economy by investing in infrastructure. At that time it was the largest investment of an Alberta government in infrastructure across the province. It was billions and billions and billions of dollars more than previous governments, and it put people to work, and I'm glad that this government is doing that same sort of thing. That was the advice of David Dodge, and though he is now retired, I'm glad to see that this government has taken up the view that that would have immediate payoffs for this province.

But it's not going to get us to where we need to go, because there are still tens and tens and tens of thousands of Albertans who are out of work. Frankly, we owe it to them to take another look at what's before us, that purportedly was set up to drive innovation and create jobs. It hasn't happened; it won't happen with doubling down, as my friend has said. Right now we're consulting with Albertans on albertasfuture.ca. We're getting a lot of traffic to that site, and we're rolling out the ideas in a crowdsourcing kind of way that Albertans are sharing. That's the kind of work that needs to be done, not the kind of work that, you know, is apparent through Bill 35, which really just speeds up where a previous bill was before this Legislature with regard to cutting taxes.

Mr. Speaker, the situation in Alberta is dire; there's no doubt about it. We're told often by folks across the way that in 2019 we were coming back, that we were roaring back. As my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford talked about a little while ago, the economy wasn't roaring back, but that's the narrative that the UCP government is trying to spin out there, that it's not their fault, you know, that they had everything under control. Well, they didn't. The UCP government was, frankly, giving away tax monies and not

getting anything in return. We all saw it. Now the narrative has changed to the long game: "Don't judge us right now; judge us in two years' time. We're going to push it out a little farther for the results to come in." Well, Albertans want to see results now, and they need results now because their families and themselves are struggling.

Twenty per cent of the homeowners' mortgages in this province are in a deferral state, Mr. Speaker. That's pretty striking when you think about it: 1 in 5 people. You look at your street. If people have mortgages on your street, 1 in 5 of those are in deferral. I don't think that's happened before, well, not probably – the '80s is when I can remember people were giving their keys to the bank because they couldn't afford the interest rates on their mortgages. You know, that's, like, 35 years ago. We've come a long way, but this is not going to help us get through all of that, get through all of this stuff that we're in today.

10:00

So let's refer. Let's put our heads together collectively. Let's sit down, talk to the Finance minister, talk to others who – and we've done this in the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee. We opened it up so, you know, stakeholders could come and talk to us about how they thought recall legislation would go, how they thought citizen initiatives would go. We learned a lot, and tomorrow we're going to be setting that course. I think we can do the same things with the jobs that are necessary in this province, that'll bring back the economy and bring back the investment. But we can't do it if we give these holidays to corporations and they don't turn around and invest in this province.

You know, we made mistakes when we were government, but we also did lots of things right, and people seem to forget that we worked through a really tough recession ourselves and that the previous PC government went to the polls a year early so that they could get out in front of the recession that was coming and left us, as the NDP government, dealing with that recession. Yes, the economy shrunk in 2014-15 – it shrunk badly – but it came back in '16. It came back in '17. It came back because we used the kinds of fiscal policy that would help the province.

We didn't have a baked-in ideology that said: we just need to rush to the bottom, and everything will be better. That's what this Bill 35 purports to do: everything is going to be better if we just rush to drop taxes and hope to God that it's going to have the effect that we say it's going to have or the Finance minister says it's going to have. Well, it hasn't turned out that way. Instead of changing course, looking at the situation and saying, like, "You know, I'm not going to do the same thing; it hasn't worked out very well; let's try something else," the Finance minister has just gone forward and done the things that haven't produced anything.

I think the referral from my colleagues before me has something that we can all put our collective heads together around. We need to reverse the damage that's been caused in this province. It's true . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be any questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate on REF1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise tonight and speak to the referral amendment on Bill 35. Now, of course, this amendment is suggesting that this bill should be sent to committee because it deserves further consideration, and I think there are a number of reasons for that.

You know, as I think and sort of reflect on some of the comments that have been made this evening, certainly the comments that were made by the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women: now, she took some great offence to comments that she alleged that some of my colleagues said in debate on this bill. But I would suggest that, much like her colleague the hon. House leader, perhaps someday, when she has completed her career in politics, whether that's willingly or unwillingly, as the case may be, she could likely find a lucrative career in speculative fiction. Now, she spoke at length about raising costs on job creators, how we need to free them to be able to contribute to their communities. Indeed, I think, all Albertans: we want them to have the freedom and the ability to be able to make contributions to their community and not be overly burdened or face obstacles to them being able to do so.

But let's be clear about what the record is of this government. As long as we're talking about lowering corporate taxes, when we're talking about lowering burdens on individuals, this is a government that is raising the costs for seniors across the province of Alberta, making it more difficult for them to afford medications for their dependants. Seniors make enormous contributions to our communities, Mr. Speaker, because monetary is not the only way to contribute. Speaking of civic society, how many of those have boards that are staffed by seniors, have seniors that are volunteering, that are contributing? They make contributions, too, and this government is making it more difficult for them to do so.

Individuals who live on AISH, Mr. Speaker: they make enormous contributions to their communities, too. This government is making their lives more difficult and more expensive, making it harder for them to have the time to be able to contribute to their communities, making their lives more difficult, raising costs.

Parents of children with special needs, Mr. Speaker, who now no longer can access those through their schools and are forced to go out into other parts of the community, forced to pay for those services privately, forced to necessarily look at maybe a private school in order to be able to maintain those supports for their children: they are left being able to contribute much less to their communities. Indeed, for those that own a business, it makes it much more difficult for them to have the time to invest in that.

Let's talk about physicians, who are small-business people in their community, and the costs this government is raising on them and how it has been undermining their ability at every turn. Do you know how much physicians contribute, especially in rural communities, Mr. Speaker, how much they invest in those communities, how much the work they provide and the value they provide improve the economic prospects of those communities? Yet this government has maintained a sustained war on them in the midst of a global pandemic.

So let's not have this government patting itself on the back. I don't believe that I'm taking anyone's comments any more out of context than that minister and these members have themselves this evening, Mr. Speaker. We can both play that game if that's what we want to do.

Now, to speak to the matter at hand, specifically the corporate tax cut which this government has decided is their be-all, end-all for economic prosperity in the province of Alberta, let's take a look at an example of another jurisdiction that pursued this and indeed touted all the same things that this government has in terms of the benefits they say this is going to provide.

Mr. Speaker, could I just get a time check, please?

The Acting Speaker: Ten minutes, 30 seconds.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Taking a look at, let's say, the U.S., where we have seen the Trump administration, the Republicans put forward legislation, their Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, they claimed that that corporate tax cut would improve the average household income in the United States by about \$4,000. Two years down the road there is absolutely no evidence that that tax cut is even beginning to benefit the average American.

Now, they said that it would trickle down to workers through a multistep process. They said: "Well, first, you slash the corporate tax rate. That's going to increase corporations' after-tax returns on investment. That's going to convince them to massively boost their spending on investments in factories, equipment, research and development. That, in turn, is going to give the average worker better capital to work with and substantially increase the overall productivity. Finally, then those workers are going to capture the benefits through increased productivity by successfully bargaining for higher wages." Indeed, President Trump's Council of Economic Advisers claimed that that would take about three to five years, for those massive trickle-down benefits to materialize.

Now, critics pointed out a couple of flaws with it. First of all, they said: well, a lot of these corporations are already holding on to a lot of cash, so if they've got money in their pocket, it's not likely to make a big difference. They also noted that the effective tax rates on U.S. corporate investment were already fairly low, especially on debt-financed investment, so they didn't anticipate it would make a huge impact. They questioned whether workers would actually see the benefit of any of those gains.

10:10

You know, what we have seen is that, in fact, the numbers from the U.S. — indeed, the IMF, International Monetary Fund, analysis of Fortune 500 companies found that just 20 per cent of the increased cash flow that these corporations have received was actually spent on increasing capital expenditures or research and development. Twenty per cent, Mr. Speaker. Eighty per cent went back to investors, into their pockets through stock buybacks, dividends, or asset planning adjustments. The vast majority of those stocks are held by the wealthy, including foreign investors, so dollars are actually leaving the U.S. and not benefiting anybody there. They were ultimately the beneficiaries of that windfall of corporate tax cuts. Those dollars are not actually getting to the American people. They are not actually creating jobs. They are not creating wealth for the average American.

Now, that's in part, Mr. Speaker, I think, because a corporate tax cut doesn't make up for other bad economic policy or other poor decisions of a government or indeed uncertainty that is created by a government. Indeed, people have noted that with a President like Trump, who made some very erratic pronouncements on tariffs — he created a lot of uncertainty for businesses, and that led many to hold back on investments. Now we look here in Alberta. When we have a government that has flirted with separatist rhetoric, that is not sending a message of certainty that encourages investment in our province. Indeed, we have seen companies specifically state that they did not invest in Alberta because of that uncertainty created by this government.

When we have a government that has uncertain policy and messaging on climate change, that is spending \$30 million on an embarrassment of an energy war room, that attacks foreign media, the Premier himself badmouthing international investors because he doesn't like the way they talk about the reality of climate change, that is cutting investment in diversification, taking \$20 out and putting \$2 or \$3 back in, when that is the message that this government is sending out, a corporate tax cut does not paper over those deficiencies.

Now, let's be clear. That corporate tax cut in the U.S.: as of late last year, pre-COVID, Mr. Speaker, they saw their corporate revenues drop by 40 per cent. That's the largest year-over-year drop ever outside of a recession: no benefit, big loss. Indeed, that is precisely what we have seen from this government so far, and that is why this bill should be referred to committee, where this government could be asked to actually speak with a wide range of experts, where we could actually get some clear evidence that doubling down on a strategy that has yet to create a single job in Alberta but indeed has seen investment and jobs flee the province after it was handed out — some of the biggest beneficiaries have cut jobs and removed investment from the province of Alberta. We are not seeing gains because of this policy.

Now, suddenly government members are talking about this being a long-term strategy, Mr. Speaker, that eventually this will pay off. The Albertans I speak with aren't interested in eventually; they are looking for jobs now. For all of this government's talk of the big investors they're speaking with, for all the Premier's talk last year of the many major investors who were just lining up at the gate, he said, waiting for this government to come into place and to introduce their cut, we have not seen a single result. This government likes to claim that they were seeing progress before COVID-19. We know that is not true. Economic growth was dropping. We lost over 50,000 jobs before COVID-19.

That is not me cheering against Albertans, as this government likes to disingenuously frame it, Mr. Speaker. It is talking about the realities that are in question here. The reason that I question this policy is because I want to see Alberta succeed. I want to see jobs come to our province, and I profoundly disagree with this particular policy of this government, that this is going to be the policy that does it, particularly when this government was the one that cut incentives that were actually creating jobs, creating jobs right here in my constituency. The interactive digital media tax credit created actual jobs because that was a tax credit that required the job to exist before the company saw a benefit from the government. Now, instead, what we have is a government shovelling the money out the door for jobs to leave the province.

I believe there are many other ways we could invest that \$4.7 billion, that they have given away in their corporate giveaway in return for absolutely no gain in jobs in the province of Alberta. There are many other, better places those dollars could be invested to actually create jobs, long-term sustainable jobs, in the province of Alberta. Indeed, that is why our government — pardon me; our caucus. I aspire, I dream, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the day. That is why our caucus has put forward our proposals, and we are continuing to do so at albertasfuture.ca, where we talk about other places where we could be investing dollars that would create actual jobs today, not merely pad the pockets of shareholders who may or may not live in the province of Alberta, may or may not actually be contributing to any civil society in the province of Alberta. There are better ways we could be investing those dollars. There are better policies we could be putting forward to attract investment and to create the kind of resilient, diversified economy that Albertans have been very clear they want to see.

Now, I understand that the government doesn't like our commenting on this. They don't like us talking about their corporate giveaway because they realize this is hurting them in the public. They recognize their record at the moment, Mr. Speaker, is incredibly poor. The average Albertan is not happy with what they are seeing from this government as they attack and undermine health care, as they cut education, as they attack and cut supports for people on AISH and at the same time utterly fail to follow through on what they actually promised to do, which was create jobs and boost the economy. When I see those kinds of results, that

would make me nervous, too, and probably a little defensive. That is a good reason to send this bill to committee and give us the opportunity to actually speak with Albertans and actually look at the evidence and actually consider what would actually create jobs in the province of Alberta as opposed to this rush to double down on a policy that has failed in every other jurisdiction that has attempted it, to double down on stale neoliberal ideology.

We will continue to bring forward our suggestions on how that could be better done, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be any takers. I see the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Listening to the previous member speak, I don't even know where to start. Let's talk about his comments on uncertainty and how this government supposedly creates some sort of uncertainty. When the previous government was in power, they created nothing but uncertainty, and they drove investment, tens of billions of dollars' worth of investment, out of this province. They lost 175,000 jobs while they were in power. They're going to come to this Chamber and talk about the uncertainty that this government is creating.

10:20

Now, we're talking about Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020. What's interesting is that this bill talks about reducing taxes for corporations. It talks about tax incentives for businesses. Now, when we look back to the previous NDP government in 2015, 2016, they came up with this plan. Actually, let me just step back to 2015. When the Wildrose opposition made the recommendation to the government that they lower small-business tax, you know what happened? They turned it down flat. They rejected that idea. Then one year later they all of a sudden come up with this great idea: we're going to reduce small-business tax. They decided that dropping corporate taxes was okay in 2016. Now we're sitting here in 2020, and we're talking about lowering corporate taxes, and all of a sudden it's some sort of crazy idea that we're handing out cash to businesses. In 2016 they didn't talk about how that was handing out cash, because it isn't. That's a lie. It's not right. They are not telling the truth over there about the corporate tax. They are not telling the truth.

In fact, when they talked about it in 2016, it was the previous Finance minister, who was just talking an hour or so ago, too – it was mind-boggling to listen to how he was talking. Here's a quote from him at that time: "[helping] job creators weather the storm . . . the right thing to do for jobs and our economy." You know what, Mr. Speaker? You know why that didn't work? You know why the NDP failed when they tried this same thing in 2015-16? It's because then they went and they raised corporate taxes. Then they brought in a carbon tax. Of course, they raised corporate tax from 10 per cent to 12 per cent. Now, we've come and we've lowered the corporate tax down to 8 per cent, which is only a 2 per cent difference from what it was before they took power. Of course, we know what happened when they raised corporate taxes 2 per cent. They took in less money because they drove the investment out. They drove corporations out. They cost the Alberta economy tens of billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Mr. Speaker, when we hear the Member for Edmonton-City Centre talking about uncertainty, their legacy is uncertainty, uncertainty in the marketplace, and driving investment out of Alberta and killing jobs. Then he comes up with this stuff: cutting education, cutting AISH. Absolutely untrue. We need to realize

here that when we hear these people speak and they're talking about jobs and the economy . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I just want to remind all members here to ensure that your comments are through the chair and not directed so directly as I think the hon. member may have been swaying towards. If you could please continue with that as a caution.

Mr. Loewen: Happy to do that, Mr. Speaker. That's why I keep saying your name, to keep my focus on you.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite come into this House, and they try to dispel or to run down this Bill 35, the one we're discussing right now. They try to suggest that it's some sort of corporate handout, and it's absolutely untrue. This is money that these corporations have earned. We're taking less taxes from them to encourage them to come to Alberta and invest money. It isn't boutique tax credits, that we're giving money to corporations to come into Alberta and set up. It's a tax reduction so that they can stay here, reinvest here, and create jobs here. What's funny is that in 2016, when the NDP tried to do the same thing, they thought it was great. Now, when we do it, they're suggesting that there's something wrong here. It's absolutely untrue.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are back on the referral amendment REF1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to reviewing the history that we've just been provided by the Member for Central Peace-Notley.

I want to again reiterate that there absolutely were times when we were in government where we did work to take ideas that were proposed by the opposition and the community and folks, for example, working in industry that was focused on tech and innovation. We worked in partnership to bring good ideas forward to this place, because we worked hard to ensure that we governed with and for the people and through the best means possible to support strong public health care, public education, and good jobs.

I have to say that when the member talks about – he used unparliamentary language; I won't repeat it – cuts to education, absolutely there are cuts to education. There are well-documented examples time after time, and this really is, again, in reference to this referral. The reason why we're proposing this be referred to committee is because I hope the government takes a moment to have sober second thought in terms of where their priorities are, where they are rushing so full speed ahead in terms of choosing to prioritize \$4.7 billion to be given to large, profitable corporations.

When the Member for Central Peace-Notley talks about tax rates, absolutely, we did support a reduction in the small-business tax rate in this province, and we did it by taking the money we had through the price on pollution and the price on carbon and reinvesting that back in those small businesses. Governing is about choices and priorities. We chose to prioritize a reduction for small businesses.

Now, the government has forgone that revenue, which is fair. They ran an election. This was one of their main pillars. They forgo that revenue, and now they're making the decision to double down on forgoing other pieces of revenue, though. The big one that we continue to talk about – and we're not going to stop, because we think you have the wrong priorities – is on page 144 of your first budget and specifically says: \$4.7 billion less in revenue from corporate taxes for large corporations. Again, that's only for the portion above \$500,000 in terms of net profit, in excess of half a million dollars. Again, these aren't the profit margins of most of

your mom-and-pop stores in your constituencies or in mine; these are the profit margins of large multinational corporations.

If the Member for Central Peace-Notley was correct in saying that it would entice other businesses from other provinces to come here – it hasn't, number one. Number two, we've seen time and time again that many corporations that have been established here for a long time are actually taking that reduction, pocketing those profit margins for shareholders and for executives, and then leaving or reducing their operations right here within Alberta. So it's not working. If the intended outcome was to attract new jobs, it's failing at that. If the intended outcome was to pad profit margins and have less revenue to be able to invest in education and health care, you're on track. You're absolutely on track. When the Premier stands and talks about sustainability, it is absolutely irresponsible and unsustainable to take away revenue and then to blame the public sector for why it is you're cutting expenditures, because you are.

Now, let's talk about bills and about values. When the Wildrose merged with the Progressive Conservatives and formed the UCP, one of the bills they voted with the government on within the last year of the previous government was a bill to index AISH. Members of the opposition, now government, stood in this place and said: "This is the right thing to do. Low-income people deserve an increase that's tied to inflation. We should have done this sooner, but – you know what? – we'll do it today." Then when they were on the campaign trail and were talking about cuts, there were members like the member for Lac La Biche, who said, you know: it's going to hurt; it's going to hurt. He was telling the truth. He absolutely was telling the truth.

Oh, the former member for Lac La Biche, not the current member for Lac La Biche. My apologies. It was the former riding that included Lac La Biche. I don't remember the name of the riding at that time, but it wasn't the current member, just to ensure that the record is correct.

An Hon. Member: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Ms Hoffman: Now it's Bonnyville-Cold Lake, but it used to be Lac La Biche and maybe Bonnyville and Cold Lake. But Lac La Biche was in the title. Happy to ensure that that's clear for the record.

10:30

The member from Lac La Biche at the time said, "It's going to hurt" when he was on the campaign trail, and that is absolutely true. It has hurt. It's hurt people on AISH when the government very quickly reversed their policy, reversed their vote, broke the legislation, and took back that index increase that was tied to AISH. Absolutely, there's been a cut to AISH. There was legislation brought into this place, and members of the government voted to do that. So don't hide behind words and talking points. Stand behind your record. Your record shows that you cut income supports for the most vulnerable.

The Premier, when he was the Leader of the Official Opposition, Her Majesty's Loyal Official Opposition, toured the province, and he did Facebook Live meetings and so forth saying, you know, "People are fearmongering; fear and smear; there's no way we'd do that; we voted for the legislation," which was true. They voted for the legislation. What wasn't true is that they absolutely did that. They reversed their plans, and they attacked the incomes of the most vulnerable. And now there continues to be talk about further reductions, examining eligibility criteria.

The Premier goes on to say: well, it's grown by so much, and it's only intended for the most severely handicapped, not the generally severely handicapped. Give me a break, Mr. Speaker. People who are determined to be severely handicapped: they met the criteria.

They had medical assessments. It's hard to get on AISH. I don't know if anyone in this room has helped somebody fill out their application or helped them write a letter for appeal, but it usually takes two or three applications, with letters from medical experts and others. So to imply that people are exploiting the system because they are fighting to have a basic income that most of us probably couldn't live on comfortably – that's for sure – I think is very disrespectful to the facts, reality, and the people who are living on AISH.

In terms of education cuts, absolutely, there have been cuts to education. They've been documented. PUF eligibility per se maybe hasn't changed, but the number of years you're eligible has absolutely changed. You used to be able to get it at two years, eight months; three years, eight months; four years, eight months, and that's changed. And when the minister is asked why, the minister says: "Well, we wanted to streamline things. It wasn't fair that you got cut off after kindergarten and had to go into general educational supports in grade 1. Therefore, we're going to cut it off a year earlier." You've got to be kidding me. This is not what people in this province voted for. They voted for people who said that they were compassionate, they voted for people who said that they were going to protect education and health care, and they voted for people who said that they were going to get them jobs. I have to say that on all accounts and on all objectives the government to date has failed.

This referral motion is a proposal for the government to stop, pause, go to committee, and take a sober second thought. Examine your priorities and determine if you really want to continue funnelling money towards large, profitable corporations or if you want to focus on the most vulnerable, if you want to focus on putting children first. Children first means you don't kick kids off their PUF programming. Children first means you don't cut the money that used to be focused on RCSD. Were there opportunities for improvement? Absolutely. But you know what isn't improving things? Blowing up the program, having speech pathologists who are outside of the system, telling parents that they can pay out of pocket for services that you used to be able to get in the school, having silos and divisions between health and education. What people want is for things to be more streamlined and supportive for students, staff, and families.

I really hope that the language that gets thrown around this place, around "there haven't been cuts," gets stopped. It isn't a dispute of the facts. The facts are that there have absolutely been cuts.

Another cut. The government continues to talk about: well, we increased the overall envelope by \$120 million. Then about two weeks after that budget was passed, the government cut \$128 million – right? – when they laid off more than 20,000 educational staff across our province. So to continue to use talking points based on a budget that you've already made substantial amendments to, that are reflected in the quarterly update, I find totally disrespectful to common sense and basic decency. Come to this place and be open and transparent and stand by your votes and stand by your values. Already we've seen this government being given awards by journalists for being the most secretive government in Canada, but please don't be that to the people. Please. I've really got to say that I am incredibly frustrated by the lack of acknowledgement of facts.

With that being said, please take an opportunity to reflect on this bill. Send it to committee. Give committee an opportunity to engage with it and to bring forward a recommendation to this House. This bill is only fast-tracking a proposal that you've tried already in the first year of government. That failed. It failed to bring jobs. It failed to even protect the jobs we already had. We lost 50,000 more before the pandemic. Please take a second to examine whether or not your strategies are working. I think it will serve you and your futures

better, and I think it will serve our province better. That's my goal, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we're here fighting for our province and creating an opportunity for it to flourish from the resources and the opportunities that we have, not continue to shovel them away and make kids and the vulnerable pay the price.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has risen.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I actually don't support referring this bill to committee. The reason being is that aside from repealing the carbon tax, reducing the corporate tax rate to 8 per cent was quite clearly the most bold and widely talked about policy that we put forward in the election. There's no denying that Albertans widely supported this, and we don't need to send this bill to committee to discuss that further.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here today because I will never apologize for lowering taxes on businesses in Alberta ever. I'm proud to be part of a government who recognizes that lowering taxes will have economic returns in the future. Yes, this bill will reduce our corporate tax rate to the lowest in all of Canada and most of North America, making Alberta a competitive place to do business. What happens when we have business? We have jobs. There's no denying that this will benefit large corporations. I used to work for one. I worked at Coca-Cola, where there are hundreds of Albertans employed. Coca-Cola's headquarters for all of western Canada are in Alberta. Why? Because Alberta is a good place to do business. Those headquarters weren't in Saskatchewan. They weren't in B.C. They were right here, and that large corporation hired hundreds of people just like me.

Also, I want to highlight that this tax reduction doesn't just help those large corporations; 97 per cent of businesses in Alberta paying the corporate tax rate are small and medium. They're businesses like my dad's. My dad is a photographer. He's not a megacorporation. He's a business of one, just him and his camera and his computer, but, Mr. Speaker, he's incorporated. My dad would benefit from a policy like this. It's crazy to me that we can pretend that this corporate tax rate is not going to help Albertans of every type across the province. Interestingly enough, I believe – I'm pretty sure on this number – that the CFIB has stated in the past that 99 per cent of Canadians are employed by small and medium-sized businesses. Why would we not want to help those people?

Also, Mr. Speaker, I am proud of this bill because it introduces the research and development tax credit. This tax credit is going to be for – it's the first of its kind in Canada and will help businesses scale their businesses in Alberta. This helps businesses invest in Alberta, grow in Alberta, and ground in Alberta for the future. That is exactly what we need. This tax rate is better than the tax credit that existed before, that had crazy clauses like an additional 5 per cent to hire women. Myself, the members for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, our Minister of Education: we didn't need a government to bribe people to help us

succeed in life. We were willing to do the hard work and succeed in life on our own, just as every woman across this province had.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to support the creation of this tax credit that will benefit businesses of every sector, not just digital media, to invest, to grow, and to ground in our province and create more jobs for people. I think that's a tremendous thing that everyone in this House should support. I've said it time and time again, but Albertans don't want a handout; they want a hand up. The best example of that is that our \$5,000 business relaunch grant this spring didn't even have a full uptake because businesses would rather be given the endorsement to reopen and resume operations than take the handout.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to support these tax credits, these tax reductions as part of our larger economic recovery plan, which includes a strong move to diversify our economy. It includes a broadband strategy so rural Albertans can work from home, geothermal, hydrogen, extended producer liability so we can create jobs in recycling. We deregulated the green energy industry and brought in \$2.5 billion in new green investment. We've got forestry amendments, \$99 million invested in child care so that parents can go back to work, and we've also invested \$10 billion in infrastructure jobs. This bill is a larger part of our entire economic recovery plan. It has been clearly endorsed by Albertans, and I am so proud to support it.

As our Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women so eloquently said the other night, to not support this bill would be to attack the very people who we claim to support as elected officials, if we consider that 99 per cent of people are employed by small and medium-sized businesses. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support this bill. This does not need to go to committee for further consultation. Frankly, Alberta is opening up, not shutting down, and this bill needs to pass.

10:40

The Acting Speaker: With 40 seconds left under 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there any hon. members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West has risen.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Banff-Kananaskis for her comments. I certainly echo the points that she made. With that, there's been some very great and robust debate this evening. I appreciate the members of the opposition and the members of the government for participating in that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, again. It was great to participate along with everybody else this evening. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 29, 2020.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:41 p.m.]

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