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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 3, 2020

Day 62

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 3, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

Motions on Alberta in the Canadian Federation

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Albertans watched as this government engaged in the most stunning act of political cowardice I have seen in my five years in this place. The UCP government used procedural tricks to prevent a vote on a motion that I proposed that would have affirmed our support for a united Canada and condemned any attempt to divide our country. They used their majority to stop this motion from even being debated or voted on and then tried to replace it with a weak, watered-down motion that does nothing to repudiate the division and negative and harmful policy of separating Alberta from Canada. There is only one word for someone who does that: cowards.

But what is this UCP government so scared of? The answer is sitting right behind them. The government is so afraid of the separatists sitting in their caucus that they will do whatever they can to keep that topic from being heard. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat wrote that Albertans do not need to be afraid of independence. The Member for Red Deer-South stood in this very Chamber and called our Confederation a "rigged partnership" and referred to our fellow Canadian provinces as "hostile, parasitic partners." The UCP are being held hostage by the separatists in their own party. They are so afraid of them that asking the UCP to stand and affirm their support for Canada is something that needs to be squashed as soon as possible. Canada should not be a wedge issue.

Mr. Speaker, I and every single member of the Official Opposition are proud Canadians. Unlike some of the members of this UCP government, I'm not afraid to stand in this Chamber and say it loudly and proudly. I'm putting the UCP government on notice. I have more love for Canada than they have procedural trickery to stop us from talking about it. This Premier claims to be a federalist, and he claims to want to stand up for Canada. It's time he started showing it and stopped trying to hide behind the standing orders. Canadians are watching.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has the call.

Role of Government

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on a concerning trend that we've seen lately. Before I do, though, it's worth taking, well, a look back in history. As members will know, global politics in the latter half of the 20th century was defined by a war of ideas. Simply put, the conflict was between those who believed that the state was master of individuals and those who

believed the individuals, people and families, were more important than the government.

Thankfully, Mr. Speaker, the right side won the war. Internationally we saw the collapse of the Soviet Union and domestically we saw the rejection of the notion that the government should be involved in every aspect of the economy and our lives. In Alberta, Canada, and across the west this was marked by a revival of the free market, a rejection of socialist politics, and widespread denationalization.

That's what I'd like to talk about, Mr. Speaker. Since we largely removed government ownership from our economy, we've seen unprecedented expansion of wealth and the quality of life. This has been the case for the working and middle class across the country. Unfortunately, it seems that the NDP want to set evidence aside. Unfortunately, it seems they want to return to government domination of the economy and society. The evidence? Well, here are a few examples. Nationalization of drivers' exams, which is an absolute disaster. They wanted to waste \$200 million to nationalize hospital laundry. Most recently they demanded the nationalization of car insurance despite evidence that B.C. — what happened there for drivers and taxpayers? It cost them millions of dollars more.

I'm worried, Mr. Speaker. What's next from the NDP? Will they demand a return to government liquor stores, maybe the return of government telephones? Perhaps they'll demand the nationalization of our oil and gas industry. The NDP need to accept that socialism is a failing and failed, outdated ideology. They need to stop trying to force big government into the lives of Albertans. They keep trying to put government ahead of individuals, families, and businesses.

The people of our province can rest assured that this government will put Albertans first. The slow dance to socialism: it's over.

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

Junior Hockey

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In towns and cities across Alberta rinks are coming back to life after the COVID-19 pandemic forced Canada's winter sport to be put on hold. Despite the minor hockey season relaunching, the Alberta Junior Hockey League and the Western Hockey League have struggled to get back on the ice.

For over 50 seasons the AJHL and WHL have played and are playing an important role for rural and urban Alberta. They not only have a big economic impact on communities across our province but also a cultural impact. They bring over \$90 million a year to Alberta's economy and contribute over \$1.4 million to charities and local minor hockey associations. AJHL and WHL teams enhance community spirit and inspire the athletic dreams of countless young athletes through positive life experiences and opportunities earned through the game of hockey.

In my riding the Drumheller Dragons have been a key part of the community since 2003. Without the Christianson family, who've given selflessly, the team couldn't function and couldn't give back to the town. Every other nonprofit is able to leverage off their platform. The family and team are generous and work collaboratively with all the charities in the valley.

As the two leagues prepare for the 2021 season, they face an uphill battle to stay afloat. If the league were a business, they would have folded by now. Currently there won't be all that many fans allowed in the stands, which also means no real concession or 50-50 sales. There are restrictions on community activities and volunteering, and public health safety measures need to be observed closely.

The effect these factors have on these leagues, their partners, local businesses, communities, and even billet families will lead to lasting negative impacts on communities from Fort McMurray to

Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie to Lloydminster, and everywhere in between. Losing these leagues and their business is not an option for the countless workers, charities, schools, the young athletes, or the members of this House who represent these communities.

I look forward to continuing my support and urge all Albertans to do the same.

The Speaker: Obviously, all members know that the Speaker is very reluctant to join in any form of debate, but I might just say that the member's choice in hockey teams leaves a little to be desired.

Economic Diversification

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, on October 29 the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation published an allegedly serious op-ed in the *National Post* arguing that the UCP government is focused on building an economy of the future. He wrote It's Time to Talk about the 'D-word' in Alberta; diversification.

Mr. Speaker, I recall one year ago when the UCP Finance minister called diversification a, quote, luxury, and like all Albertans I have not forgotten that this government has spent its entire time in office scrapping every attempt to diversify Alberta's economy. They cut the funding for refining, upgrading, and petrochemicals. They cut funding for innovation, artificial intelligence, renewables, and tourism. They eliminated the Alberta investor tax credit, which supported businesses that were working on new technologies. They cut the interactive digital media tax credit and the scientific research and experimental development tax credit. These programs created good, well-paying jobs, but the UCP's mismanagement stopped all that.

East Side Games had been considering expanding in Alberta. After the UCP's job-killing budget was passed, they cancelled that plan. Their CEO wrote, quote, the message is clear; you don't want anything new. When Wattpad cited the UCP's attack on the tech industry and cuts to tax credits in its decision not to locate in Alberta, the Premier demonized them instead of changing course.

The truth is that the UCP can talk about the D-word all they want, but Albertans aren't buying it. This government has stood in the way of economic diversification so that they can line the pockets of their wealthy friends with a \$4.7 billion job-killing corporate handout.

Alberta's NDP has a real plan to diversify our economy, and you can read about it at albertasfuture.ca. albertasfuture.ca.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a member's statement.

November

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, November is known as Movember, a time to bring awareness to men-specific cancer. I challenge all the men that are able to grow a beard, a mustache, goatee, sideburn to support and raise awareness for men's cancer. One in 9 men in Canada are diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime, and testicular cancer is the most common type of cancer for young men. Both are very treatable and recognizable types of cancer if caught early.

1:40

I know that many of us have been touched by someone with cancer, myself included. Someone very close to me had just been diagnosed with neuroendocrine tumors, which are also known as NETs. This type of cancer is known as the zebra in the room and has the zebra as their symbol because it often gets overlooked and unnoticed. NETs patients have symptoms that are common to other

issues or do not show up until it metabolizes into another place in the body, and at that stage it's often too late to treat. There are many different variations of NETs, and they can be in different parts of the body such as gastrointestinal NETs. The symptoms for GI NETs are as common as heartburn, a stomach ache, which can easily be overlooked.

NETs is not a common cancer. Most oncologists do not specialize in it, let alone have treated someone with it, even though there are thousands of people living with NETs. I am thankful that my loved one was diagnosed early and is still with us today. I do have concerns for many people who may be living with NETs unknowingly or are possibly misdiagnosed.

I'm passionate about raising awareness for all types of cancer. Cancer can touch your life in numerous ways and often can be prevented by early screening, leading to early treatment. I would like to bring awareness to this Assembly that November 10 is the Worldwide NET Cancer Awareness Day. If you are able to donate to organizations that contribute to cancer research and patient care, I encourage you to do so. The organizations that I would like to recognize for their amazing work are: Haying in the 30's, Kids with Cancer Society, and the Alberta Cancer Foundation.

Thank you.

Postsecondary Tuition and Student Loans

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling, and this government is turning a deaf ear. The COVID crisis has caused both a health and economic crisis and, for many, an economic crisis brought on by their very own government. At a time when Albertans should be able to count on a government that has their backs, they are instead faced with one that is pushing stubbornly forward and doubling down on measures to pay for a \$4.7 billion giveaway.

Last year when the UCP announced that they would be increasing interest rates on Alberta student loans, we told them that this would cause hardships. And this was even before the pandemic hit. While the federal government was lowering interest rates, the UCP seemed to see this as an opportunity to charge students more, and we are the only jurisdiction in Canada to do so, on top of the massive new increases to tuition. Mr. Speaker, while other provinces are working to lower costs and interest for postsecondary, this UCP government is saying: how can we make things more expensive and out of reach for our students? At a time when graduates are struggling to find work in a province with the second-highest unemployment rate in the country, the UCP thinks recent graduates somehow have more room to pay extra for their tuition and so forth.

The UCP will try to tell you that they have supported Albertans with a student loan deferral, but, Mr. Speaker, this has ended. To add insult to injury, they have tacked on an extra interest rate so that many are struggling to make ends meet. I have heard from constituents and student loan holders across the province that these decisions of the government have put them in a very precarious situation.

The COVID crisis continues, and this government continues to cut jobs left, right, and centre. Mr. Speaker, Albertans need supports and economic recovery, not a government reaching into their pockets during this time of crisis.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane has risen.

Energy Industry Investment in Alberta

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada and Alberta are world leaders in environmental, social, and governance. We are in

the top three in whatever ESG metrics you want to look at for oil-producing nations. Climate change is a global challenge. Responsibly developed Canadian oil and gas is the global solution. That is the message that needs to get delivered to the world. There are those that actively seek to end resource development in Canada. They aim to increase costs with more red tape and restrictions, claiming that it will bring in capital.

But the primary reason why the energy sector is suffering is a lack of return on investment. In the five-year period from 2014 through 2018, Canada's oil and gas sector ranked 67th for return on capital with a rate of negative 1.5 per cent. If you ask any financier to invest in a project having the highest level of ESG but zero ROI, they will tell you every time that they would not invest. That is stopping investment and causing massive job losses, not the best ESG record on the planet.

We need to realize that the consequences of the current bad policies are the same as the consequences of the national energy program. The policies may have different names and be from different eras, but the outcome is the same, and there is one very similar name to all of these policies: Trudeau. We have to fight, fight in the courts, deliver in the media. We have to raise awareness around Canada's ESG record, and energy companies need to begin a unified effort to save the industry. We need to play to our strengths and use the fair deal initiatives as leverage, and we have to stop capitulating to Trudeau and the intrusion of Ottawa into Alberta's resource development. We didn't capitulate to Trudeau in the '80s, so there's no need to do it now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Rural Internet

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we all recognize just how important the Internet has become in our lives. We use it every day for business, communications, and keeping up with friends and family. However, not all Albertans enjoy the same degree of connectivity, with rural Alberta falling significantly behind their urban counterparts. The difference between urban and rural Internet has often been referred to as the digital gulf or the digital divide. In reality, it's more akin to a digital chasm. The gap between urban and rural Internet has continued to grow, having dire consequences on the affected rural communities.

Internet is needed by everyone: students, adults, families, businesses. Without it, some businesses in rural Alberta cannot even connect properly to a debit machine. This has prompted the community of Vermilion in my riding to take brave first steps at a potential solution to this problem. Vermilion has been struggling with their Internet for many years and has decided to take initiative and work towards a fix. By signing an agreement with Bell to have access to the Internet, that they then provide to residents, they are joining a small group of municipalities in Alberta who are becoming Internet service providers, or ISPs, themselves.

This does not come without a cost. The town pays \$4,000 a month simply to get access to the Net. The cost means that Vermilion will sacrifice some infrastructure projects in order to fill the dire need for Internet. Without it, the viability of the community is at stake.

We must ensure that rural Alberta has access to the Internet, just as urban Alberta. Doing so will enable existing businesses to stay open and even cause new businesses to form, which is critical for the Alberta government's recovery plan. We need to bring rural Alberta up to the same standards as urban Alberta so that instead of feeling dejected and forgotten, they feel valued and empowered.

Thank you.

National Debt

Mr. Barnes: I, like many Canadians, am increasingly worried about the drastic rise of our national debt. We are now expected to hit \$1.2 trillion. What did the Liberals inherit in 2015? A debt of about \$612 billion and a budgetary surplus of \$1.9 billion. Let's put that into perspective for a moment. A country created in 1867 had up to 2015 a debt of \$612 billion. Along comes Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who said that the budget would balance itself, but in just under six years our national debt will climb to \$1.2 trillion, double what it was when Trudeau took office. I am shocked, disappointed, and increasingly worried about Canada's future generations' tax burden and driving investment dollars from Canada.

Not only debt, Mr. Speaker, but also a mass printing of money is taking place in Canada and around the world. This only further drives away investment and increases the costs of all goods needed for survival. Countries have tried this in the past, and it has been disastrous.

Now, I know we've gone through a pandemic; however, Canada's spending leaves us with little to show for it. Our national unemployment is high, but can we really be surprised? He has gone after Alberta's economy, Canada's economic engine, with the economy-killing climate policies, and then he wonders why the job numbers are so bad.

The federal Liberals have spent away our country's future, and all we have to show for it is a leader who is now on his third ethics investigation, on which he was found guilty of the first two so far. Three strikes and you're out, right, Mr. Speaker?

During a recent fiscal snapshot details were not even given as to where the latest federal \$343 billion deficit would be spent. It's a fiscal train wreck and one that I hope serves as a warning of what can happen when politicians discuss self-balancing budgets and government spending is not focused or controlled.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Testing, Contact Tracing, and Modelling

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cases are exploding, the number of outbreaks is troubling, and the pandemic is deepening. Last week Alberta had the second-highest growth in new cases in Canada, just behind Manitoba, a province that's just gone back into severe lockdown. Yesterday the Premier finally acknowledged that Alberta must expand our contact tracing network and accelerate our test turnaround times. He seems to have realized that Albertans are not on the same special list that he is. Premier, those promises are vague, so I ask today, and be specific: what is the turnaround time you're targeting for tests, how many contact tracers are you hiring, and when will they be in place?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is completely wrong, as usual, when she says that the government "finally acknowledged" the need to hire more contact tracers and accelerate test turnaround times. In fact, pre-COVID we had 50 contact tracers; we now have 800. We've been hiring and training as many as we can. Our current short-term goal is an additional 380.

With respect to testing it was actually the NDP that criticized some of the measures recommended by Dr. Hinshaw to reduce asymptomatic testing precisely so that we could increase test turnaround times. We're on track right now for a 24- to 48-hour turnaround time.

Ms Notley: Well, we could cut the number of tests or put more resources and get somewhere close to the Premier's 20,000 target.

But we need to track the spread. The Premier promised Albertans we'd have access to the national tracking app months ago. Instead, we've lost two and a half months of uptake, new cases are spiking, and we don't know where more than half of them are coming from. The Premier is preaching personal responsibility while blocking Albertans from exercising it. Premier, when will you allow Albertans to take measures to protect themselves, or is, quote, owning the libs in the App Store really more important to you?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader just suggested that it's limited resources that is affecting testing. In fact, Alberta has consistently led Canada in per capita testing since March, through most of that period, and we've led much of the world. Why is she so keen on running down this province? Some of the highest testing, the most effective contact tracing in Canada, the first jurisdiction in Canada with an app, the first jurisdiction in Canada with a self-assessment tool, the best record in Canada and within the world on PPE preparedness: I'm proud of the team that's been working so well to combat COVID in Alberta.

Ms Notley: Well, the Premier actually has failed to reach his so-called testing goal, he's actually behind on contact tracing, and he's blocking the national app. Cases are spiking, and it's just not good enough. You know what? Albertans need him to give them what they need in order to keep them safe. They also need modelling. The Premier is suggesting that we can't do modelling because it wasn't good at the beginning, and therefore we can never do it again. But we know that's what Albertans need. You either forced modelling to stop, or you're hiding it. When will Albertans get that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Neither, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the tracing app I'll remind the leader that Alberta was months ahead of any jurisdiction in Canada in developing and publishing the ABTraceTogether app, which has been downloaded by about a quarter of a million Albertans. She could help to promote that app, Mr. Speaker, by pointing out that both the iOS and Android versions now operate on the back of people's phones rather than the front, so it's much more user friendly, and unlike the federal app, it's actually connected to our contact tracing network, therefore significantly more effective from a public health point of view.

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

Alberta Separatism

Ms Notley: Albertans are frustrated, and they're scared for their economic security. They want a better shake from Ottawa – that's true – and they believe the federal government isn't doing enough. But here's the rub. This Premier promised jobs, economy, pipelines, but he's failed on all three. Stoking separation is not only a distraction; it makes our economy worse, it hurts jobs, and it hurts investment. Why won't the Premier show leadership and ensure that every member of the government of Alberta caucus stands united against separatism that threatens to divide us from Canada, actually stand up against separatism?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to do that, we'd be happy to put to a vote my Motion 29:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

(a) affirm its loyalty to a united Canadian federation, and

(b) urge the government to obtain a fair deal for Alberta within the Canadian federation.

Mr. Speaker, there is deep frustration in this province, and, you know, all the NDP is doing is trying to inflame that by denouncing people, by calling them names, from a party that helped to create that frustration by standing by Mr. Trudeau's veto of Northern Gateway, his killing of Energy East, and his imposition of the carbon tax.

Ms Notley: The Premier's motion is nothing but a tactic to hide from his own caucus. Moreover, this Premier doesn't get out of bed in the morning without condemning, insulting, or cancelling one Albertan or another. He calls doctors liars. He calls front-line health workers overpaid. He's launched war rooms, public inquiries, and lawsuits to silence those who disagree with him. He's used the Legislature to limit Albertans' right to protest and muzzled their right to collectively organize, advocate, and speak. Now the so-called federalist says that we need to give more separatist organizations more airtime so they can speak all they want. Premier, will you walk the talk and denounce separatist groups threatening this province?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, as I've made clear repeatedly, I disagree with the concept of separatism – I think it would be harmful to Alberta – but I respect the Albertans who hold a different view than mine, and I'm prepared to listen to them respectfully and indeed respond to what I think are powerfully legitimate concerns they have about the unfairness with which Alberta is treated in the federation. But being called names by a bunch of socialists who helped to kill pipelines is not going to address that very significant and heartfelt concern amongst many Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was the most disingenuous display I've seen yet from this Premier, and that's saying something.

This isn't about protecting or listening to constituents. This is about protecting the separatists in his own caucus, who clearly have power over him. Wexit, Wildrose Independence, the Buffalo Project: these groups are preying on people's anger and fear to sell them false solutions. They are also the same people who helped this Premier get elected. Albertans deserve a governing party that refuses to cater to separatists. Premier, will you or will you not provide that to them?

Mr. Kenney: Well, it's news to me that they helped me get elected. The Independence Party was on the ballot in the last election. It got less than 1 per cent of the vote.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, the NDP wants to inflame the deep frustration in this province by denouncing people. They love cancel culture. They love calling people names. I think we need leaders to seek to unite people, and one way you can unite Albertans is by fighting for a fair deal in this federation. That's what we're determined to do. While the NDP cheered on Mr. Trudeau in cancelling pipelines, we're fighting that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Corporate Taxation and Job Creation

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the UCP have based their credibility on their \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout to already-profitable corporations. In October alone we saw 4,000 layoffs at Cenovus and Suncor. Those same two companies have told their shareholders that they have received \$1.6 billion, combined, of that corporate handout. What evidence does the Premier have to justify the corporate handout as a jobs strategy – jobs – and will he table that evidence today?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been nice to hear from the, quote, Finance critic from the Official Opposition, who on the day that this government revealed a \$24 billion projected deficit this year suggested that this could be addressed with a 1 per cent income tax increase on individuals earning over \$400,000 a year. Well, Treasury Board and Finance has come back with an estimate. That tax hike would raise approximately \$50 million. We would still have a \$24 billion deficit. The NDP is the face of gross fiscal and economic incompetence.

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I never said such a thing, and one would think that Canada's least popular Premier, leading Canada's worst economy, would be motivated to give better answers.

Out-of-work Albertans want to see evidence that the corporate handout will create jobs, but all the UCP have provided is four blank pages. Can the Premier explain why he's speeding up the no-jobs corporate handout with no evidence to back him up, and if there is evidence, why is he hiding it from Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we're not hiding it. We ran on it. It's a centerpiece of our commitment to Albertans, and we released multiple economic projections about its positive growth impact on jobs and the economy. But the member opposite said, quote, we can do a 1 per cent wealth tax on the 1 per cent, so that would mean that people earning over \$400,000 a year would pay 1 per cent more in taxes. She said that on August 28. That is her solution, a \$50 million tax increase to a \$24 billion deficit. It's pathetic. [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, that same Treasury Board and Finance found that \$4.7 billion is actually what's being given away in a no-jobs corporate handout.

Now, the Premier claims he doesn't have a single briefing note about speeding up the corporate handout. The analysis he frequently cites has been debunked by his own officials. We did get that briefing note. The Premier is not trustworthy. Out-of-work Albertans cannot take him at his word. He hides, he covers up, and when that fails, he yells at people. But that doesn't create jobs. Will the Premier explain to out-of-work Albertans why he's hiding the truth from them about his failed jobs strategy?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I must say that when that member is asking questions, I do feel a sense of nostalgia. I feel like I'm back doing a grade 10 high school debate. Let me say this. I'm hiding in plain sight here in question period, as I was yesterday. I did a news conference yesterday. I took questions from the Calgary Chamber of commerce yesterday. But what I know is this. That party wants to raise taxes on job creators by 50 per cent in the midst of a historic economic contraction. They want to drive out investment, kill businesses, and kill jobs. That's why they were handed a historic defeat in the last election. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Automobile Insurance Premiums

Mr. Carson: Yesterday we heard the UCP tell the truth. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka said, and I quote: insurance is the best money-making machine in the world. That's certainly the case under this UCP government, who jacked up premiums on Albertans and is selling out to industry at every opportunity. To the Minister

of Finance: why are you doing everything you can to increase the profits of this great money-making machine at the same time as you are expensing these to injured Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing on this side of the House is that we are proposing several changes that will fundamentally deal with the cost pressures that are driving up insurance premiums. Unlike the members opposite, who did not have the courage to deal with the issue, this government is dealing with the issue. It will result in reduced premiums. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Carson: Well, the Minister of Finance knows that Alberta's largest auto insurer brought in \$200 million more in premiums than they paid out in claims in 2018. He believes that simply wasn't enough profit, so he gave them a giant handout and jacked up premiums by 24 per cent on Albertans needing their cars to get to work and pick up their kids. To the Minister of Finance. Albertans are begging you to pump the brakes on these outrageous insurance increases. Why do you instead continue to accelerate profits with zero commitment that it will actually drop insurance premiums?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take the member opposite's questions as support for our bill that we have on the floor that will reduce premiums for Alberta motorists. What I do want to point out is that the members opposite would actually have us nationalize the insurance industry, which would be a catastrophic failure for Albertans. All we have to do is take a look at B.C.: higher premiums and billions of dollars of losses.

Mr. Carson: Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. Insurance companies are profitable and are already receiving more because of this Premier's \$4.7 billion corporate handout. Families and businesses are struggling, yet this minister will make zero commitment to Albertans who need relief on their premiums today. If it wasn't bad enough, he's promising to start limiting payouts to injured Albertans. To the Minister of Finance. Albertans are angry at you. They want to know why you are hell bent on selling out the insurance industry to them at every single turn while providing no support to Alberta drivers.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I call on the members opposite to pass this bill expeditiously because the bill we have in front of the House will reduce premiums for Alberta motorists. Again, unlike the members opposite, who simply kicked the can down the road and did not have the courage to deal with the fundamental cost drivers that were putting up premiums, this government will deliver.

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

Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction Program

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to see the Premier and the Minister of Environment and Parks yesterday announcing from the industry-supported technology innovation and

emissions reduction program, or TIER program, a new round of shovel-ready projects. Given that these projects will support good jobs for Albertans at a time when we need them the most, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: can you please tell this House more about the projects and more about the types of jobs that this vital program will create and support?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, when industry and other government funds are added to the TIER stimulus package, it will inject \$1.9 billion into Alberta's economy and support over 9,000 jobs. It will immediately put to work electricians, HVAC technicians, plumbing and heating experts, equipment distributors, and other energy professionals, technologists, engineers. It is a great example of us meeting our environmental obligations while helping to stimulate the economy and getting Albertans back to work.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one of the pillars of the Alberta economic recovery plan is creating new markets within our province's core industries and given that Albertans are known as innovators and leaders in pioneering new ways in the industries that have sustained our province for generations, to the same minister: can you please inform this House which of the province's most important industries will continue to be supported by job-creating TIER funding?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, TIER will of course continue to be able to help with the oil and gas industry but as well with forestry, agriculture, transportation, manufacturing, wholesale, and waste management all across the province. Again, a great example of being able to use the technology innovation and emissions reduction fund, supported by industry, in partnership with industry to develop new technologies while creating jobs, while reducing emissions. It's a great example of our government's approach of being able to meet our environmental obligations while putting Albertans back to work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is important for Alberta's government to be prudent with taxpayer dollars at all times but especially during a pandemic and given that our recovery largely relies on getting Albertans back to work right away, to the minister: can you please tell us here in the House, regarding projects under the TIER program, how will they be evaluated, how will they save job creators money, and how will they get Albertans back to work?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we work with our partners in Emissions Reduction Alberta to be able to evaluate projects. We make sure they are immediately scalable, have rock-solid business plans, and can immediately get Albertans back to work and get projects off the ground. The system is designed so that government money is the last money in, guaranteeing the best investment for taxpayers. Again, we're very proud to work with industry to invest \$1.9 billion in environmental technology in this province at the very time that we need to create jobs. That \$1.9 billion is going to put 9,000 Albertans back to work.

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

Health System Concerns

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 situation in Alberta grows worse with each passing day. Yesterday Covenant

Health announced outbreaks in three units of the Grey Nuns hospital. That means all four of Edmonton's acute-care hospitals and two of Calgary's largest all have outbreaks. Given that's the case, will the Minister of Health stop his plan to fire 11,000 front-line hospital workers, and what other concrete steps will he take to protect our hospital capacity and prevent a second lockdown?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, just last week the NDP were shocked when I reminded them that they contracted out when they were in government to the health system. I pointed out to them that it was the exact same thing that they did. For their continuing education, I'm going to list some of the private corporations – these are corporations with dividends and shareholders – that they contracted out in the health system under the NDP. I invite them to let me know when I get to a corporation that they terminated the contract for: Sodexo, Good Earth, Tim Hortons, Pizza Pizza, Aramark, K-Bro Linen, Rexall . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, the minister had not a word about an actual plan to protect our hospital capacity and given that there is currently only one outbreak in an acute-care facility outside of Edmonton and Calgary and given that this minister has named hospital capacity as the key metric in making decisions about additional restrictions to our economy, is the minister considering moving patients out of Edmonton or Calgary hospitals to rural or small urban hospitals, and if he is considering this, can he detail how those plans might work here in the House today?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, hospital capacity is one of our greatest concerns in the ministry and in this government, to be able to make sure that we're going to ensure that our hospitals and the health system as a whole can take care of those who are critically ill throughout the province throughout this pandemic. We're going to make sure. That's one of the reasons why we came out with the targeted and focused measures that we announced last week, so that we can ensure that in the Edmonton zone and in Calgary zone our hospitals continue to have that capacity. That's going to be our focus going forward in this pandemic.

2:10

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the minister may always look on the bright side of life but we know that there have been real delays in contact tracing, which means that, in fact, an infected person may spread the COVID-19 virus even if they follow all the public health orders in good faith, and given that the government's ABTraceTogether app has had several technical problems and not been widely accepted by Albertans and given this government is now on to its third different story for why it has failed to accept the national contact tracing app, when will this minister drop his excuses and give Albertans that additional tool to prevent a second lockdown, a tool that Canadians in eight other provinces already have and use?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always happy to rise and answer questions from the Ananias club over there. Look, they keep on cheering against our response to the pandemic, but we have proven to be leaders in contact tracing. We were the first province and maybe even the first jurisdiction in this continent to be able to come out with a tracing app. The federal app is not a tracing app. It is a notification app. We're in conversations with our federal partners on how that could be implemented in Alberta. But

it's unfortunate that the NDP continue to slander the tracing app that we have implemented here in Alberta.

Mr. Shepherd: Keep your story straight, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is the only one.

COVID-19 Outbreak at the Calgary Correctional Centre

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here again to question this government's failure to respond to outbreaks of COVID-19 at correctional facilities and in particular at the Calgary correctional facility. Two-thirds of inmates and 27 staff members are infected, and conditions are only getting worse. Yesterday the government said that they are doing everything they can. Last week the Minister of Justice stated that they are proud of their response. Is this really all you can do, pat yourselves on the back while inmates and staff fear for their lives?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, this is not an issue that we are going to allow the NDP to play politics, as usual. We have worked very closely with the chief medical officer of health, and we have implemented all of the protocols that they required us to put in place. We are containing this virus, and we will make sure that we keep our staff and the inmates at our correctional facilities safe, secure, and healthy.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this government's reckless response to the Calgary Correctional Centre outbreak is putting the lives of Albertans at risk and given that the Alberta prison society has written to the office of the minister calling for drastic action to stop the outbreak and given that yesterday the government said that we should take the politics out of this, to the minister. No politics. This is a matter of public safety. Will you commit to drastic action here and now and be specific on what those actions are?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, if there is anyone in this particular House who is pursuing actions that would affect our ability to take care of this particular virus, I would submit that it is the members opposite by their fear and smear campaign. The fact is that we are relying on the evidence and advice of the chief medical officer of health. What else would they want us to do? Abandon science, abandon data, and put fear in our population? That is not what we are going to do to deal with this pandemic.

Mr. Sabir: Given that it's not fear and smear, given it's a breach of basic human rights of inmates by holding them in solitary confinement and not doing enough to clean up the unsanitary conditions inside the prison and given this government is forcing staff to come to work despite acknowledging they may be positive for COVID-19, to the Minister of Justice. I know you're new on this job, but that's not an excuse for what's bordering on criminal negligence. What are you doing about this today? Be specific.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean – you know what? – we have done and continue to do everything we can to keep that population secure, safe, and healthy. To all of our staff who are at our correctional facilities, they need to know that this government is doing everything we can to keep them safe. We continue to work with our health care professionals and the chief medical officer of health to make sure that we contain this virus, and I can assure them that this virus and the outbreak at the facility is being contained.

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

Junior Hockey

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Live events contribute to our economy and our vibrant culture and heritage. Albertans are concerned about the future of cultural events and sports, including their local junior hockey teams. I know that residents in my riding are concerned about the future of our team, the Spruce Grove Saints. Junior hockey is not only important to the physical fitness of young Albertans, but it is essential to their mental health and well-being. To the minister responsible for sport: with this in mind, can you please update the Assembly on the future of this year's AJHL season?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member and for the awesome jersey. Nice job on that today. Live events were some of the first to feel the impact and will be amongst some of the latest to return. However, I know that the member will be pleased to hear that the Spruce Grove Saints are going to get their shot at the AJHL title in 2020-2021. The AJHL board of governors has recently approved a regular season start of November 13, and the AJHL teams will play within a format of south division and north division. A decision as to the end date and playoff format will be determined at a later date.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. This is welcome news to hockey fans in communities right across Alberta.

Given that junior hockey is critical to our heritage, quality of life, and to building stronger communities and given that the 15 teams of the AJHL are hubs for family fun, volunteerism, and community pride, to the same minister: how is Alberta's government ensuring that the roots of junior hockey will continue to run deep in our communities for years to come?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you again for the question. I've had the huge honour and privilege of being able to meet with many of the groups and associations. We're committed to helping Alberta's strong and storied junior hockey league power through this challenging time, and supporting the organizations is part of Alberta's recovery plan. When sports and arts and culture thrive, Alberta thrives. A huge thank you to the elite and amateur sports leagues who are helping us gather some really, really important information at this time to help us be able to support their recovery.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given that these are unprecedented times and that when the puck drops, teams will continue to struggle as they play in nearly empty arenas and given that as we enter recovery organizations that offer sport or recreation activities must follow Alberta Health guidelines, which directly impact the financial viability of AJHL franchises like the Spruce Grove Saints in my riding, can the minister please update the Assembly on the efforts that Alberta's government and the AJHL have taken in this regard?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, again. First of all, I'd like to thank the Minister of Health for his great work and Dr. Deena Hinshaw for amazing work on this. We've been working together to ensure the release of the junior, collegiate, and university guidance documents for a safe return to play. That includes cohorts of 150 participants,

arena capacity limits, social distancing protocols, and special processes for tickets as well, following the health regulations within each of those communities. Again, we're really excited to see them return safely and hit the ice as soon as possible. Thank you very much for these questions.

Road and Bridge Construction Funding

Member Loyola: Make no mistake. The Premier promised no tolls on roads and bridges during the election, but that turned out to be a broken promise. The Tompkins crossing toll bridge in Mackenzie county might be first, but it certainly won't be the last. This government's record paints a picture of the future for Alberta drivers. Every day they'll get the privilege of having this government suck a few more dollars out of their wallets to pay for their \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway. To the Minister of Transportation: why did you break your no-tolls election promise and sell out Albertans?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, our government is very focused on building critical infrastructure that will build a prosperous future for Albertans. If certain residents of Alberta come to the Minister of Transportation and ask him to build an infrastructure project, and if they look at outright financing – our government said that we'll look at all options to build world-class infrastructure and create local jobs. But the NDP: their way is just to starve Albertans and not provide a better living . . .

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

Member Loyola: Given that this new UCP government loves toll roads and making life more expensive for Alberta families and given that this government loves finding new fees and charges to levy on Albertans from camping fees, school fees, tuition fees and given that there are more than 30,000 kilometres of highways waiting to be tolled and we know this government has just found its new favourite cash cow, to the Minister of Transportation. All that people can see are tolls on the horizons, and they're angry. Can you please tell this House who your next toll victim is going to be?

2:20

Mr. Panda: We know who Albertans are angry at. That's why they were fired. That's why they're sitting there. They still didn't learn that lesson yet.

Mr. Speaker, our transport minister: first he is consulting Albertans, and he is going to provide options for Albertans. If he's going to build toll roads, he's going to give an option for people not to use those toll roads, and he's going to actually speak more on this in this House in the coming days. I would encourage the member to actually offer constructive criticism rather than denying Albertans . . .

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

Member Loyola: Given that we can't trust anything this government has to say on tolls after they broke their election promise and given that the Premier said that it was fearmongering to suggest any tolls would come to Alberta under his watch and given that Calgarians are seeing the ring road's final piece is under construction and they're wondering if tolls are on the way, and given that the people in Lethbridge are waiting for their new bridge and they're wondering if tolls are on the way, to the Minister of Transportation: will you come clean with Albertans, and tell them who is next in line on your toll hit list?

Mr. Kenney: Well, since I was mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we did commit not to toll any existing infrastructure. There is no bridge over the Peace River in that area, and the local constituents there

have asked for this opportunity. What the NDP wanted to give them was a ferry that they can't stand up there because they have to wait for hours to cross the bridge and to get to work, to do business, to create wealth and jobs. Let me point out that this government is investing \$10 billion in capital building and infrastructure this year, the highest amount in the history of Alberta, creating 50,000 jobs, good construction jobs, right now.

Music Industry Support

Ms Goehring: A number of times I've risen in this House to ask about how this government is supporting artists in the province, and the minister proceeds to mock my questions. However, a new report out last week makes clear the importance of the music industry on the economy, which, to be clear, is just one sector in the arts. The music industry alone contributes more than \$2.1 billion to the economy and employs over 20,000 Albertans. To the minister of culture: once and for all tell the House what you're actually going to do to support musicians, or will you admit you have no plan, and that's why your answers are so tone deaf?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of community services.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can attest to the fact that the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women is working diligently with all stakeholders and groups and associations to answer these questions and to provide a credible path forward as we navigate through this difficult time.

Ms Goehring: Given that musicians are asking for this minister to do more than sing from the same song sheet over and over and given that this minister has repeatedly said that the industry only wants opportunities and given that opportunities require venues and given that the report highlights that there are no policies protecting venues and given that the music industry provides enormous opportunity for economic growth and diversification, to the same minister. Surely you have a concrete plan and policy to ensure a vibrant music industry and the venues they require as part of your economic recovery plan. Please share those details with the Assembly here and now.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the arts and culture sectors are important to Alberta's recovery. When the arts thrive, our province is a better place to live, invest, and do business. To help artists through this difficult time, the Alberta government gave a \$150,000 grant to the Alberta spotlight online concert series. As well, more than \$300,000 in Alberta Culture Days grants supporting many events have been granted that pay artists for their good work.

Ms Goehring: Given that the West Anthem group that commissioned this report represents collaboration between entertainment venues and organizations throughout the province and given that Albertans have significant investments in this industry and given that this minister continues to brush off the massive cuts that her ministry has undertaken, which directly impact a number of these organizations, and given that they seem to have a better understanding and appreciation for the arts than the government, to the same minister: will you at least commit to listening to the West Anthem report and addressing their concerns raised in their report? Will you report back to this House on what you learn and the actions you will take and when?

Mrs. Sawhney: Again, Mr. Speaker, I can attest to the fact that the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women is working very closely with all stakeholders in this particular sector

to find a path forward that supports Alberta's relaunch and recovery.

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

Aviation and Aerospace Industry Development

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government has identified aviation and aerospace as key sectors in Alberta's diversification plan. This goes well beyond cargo and air commercial routes. It includes pilot training, aircraft maintenance, medical, fire and infrastructure safety management, agricultural applications, and diverse technologies emerging in the fields of aerospace and remote piloted air systems. When we support this sector and its unique programs, we provide broad opportunities for talented Albertans. To the Minister of Transportation: can you share with us the importance of this sector to recovery and diversification in Alberta's highest-flying industries?

Mr. Panda: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his question and the work he has done on this subject. Aviation is a key component in selling Alberta to the world, and Alberta is a transportation and logistics hub. We have award-winning, world-class airports on the major great circle routes with free trade zones and a highway and a railway network that connects Alberta to the rest of North America and the world. I was happy to support the member's bill, Bill 201, Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act, and the council will make recommendations to attract air services . . .

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Foremost, Alberta, has Canada's only beyond-the-line-of-sight drone testing range and given that drone technology and real-life applications are set to rapidly change our world, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: how will this government support the development of world-leading technology and attraction of investment and expertise in support of this emerging sector?

Thank you.

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. I must say that with this new ministry that I'm in, I think this is the most interesting file in all of government because when else do you get to answer a question in question period about drones? The technology in this area is evolving so quickly. Here in Alberta we have the ability with the line-of-sight drone testing range to be at the forefront of innovation in this space. I still need to learn more about drones and what the opportunities are for Albertans, but I'm looking forward to working with the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who is so passionate about this issue, and many other members of this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think we'll be droning on on this topic much longer.

Given the importance of heavy aircraft maintenance to global aviation operations and safety and given the looming shortage of trained maintenance personnel opening the doors for Alberta to rekindle our legacy of leadership within this industry and further given that current capacity, expertise, and reputations are but harbingers of a bright future, to the Minister of Advanced Education:

how is this government encouraging Albertans to prepare for these emerging opportunities in the skilled trades?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the excellent question. We know that there is a pending labour force shortage, and Alberta's government has doubled down its efforts on building a highly skilled and diversified workforce. Just last Friday the Minister of Advanced Education had the privilege to announce an expanded partnership with Mitacs that will see over 3,800 new internships for Alberta students in a wide variety of sectors such as energy, tech, and aviation. These internships will align with key sectors in Alberta's recovery plan, including aviation. Skills matter, and they are at the heart of a strong and vibrant economy. We must ensure all Albertans have the skills they need for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Crowsnest Pass Coal Mine Proposal

Mr. Schmidt: This past spring most Albertans were surprised to learn that the UCP government had ripped up the long-standing provincial policy on open-pit coal mining. Over the summer we at least learned how the minister came up with this terrible idea, by enjoying the good life with Australian billionaires at golf clubs. Albertans are increasingly worried about the impacts that coal mining will have on their water quality, and so far there's been no action from the minister to do anything to protect Alberta's headwaters. Why is it that the minister enjoys champagne with foreign billionaires while the Crowsnest Pass has to be worried about its drinking water?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy changed the 1976 coal policy to be able to modernize the regulatory process inside the province. Ultimately, the Ministry of Energy is responsible for the management of coal mines inside the province of Alberta, but the department of environment, which I am responsible for, has not changed one environmental regulation when it comes to coal. In fact, the full regulatory process remains in place, and protection for things like headwaters do remain in place. If the member would do a little bit more research, he would also know that I've signed a ministerial order reaffirming the protection of category 1 lands, which include headwaters, and they are very much protected from coal development.

2:30

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the people of the Crowsnest Pass and all over Alberta have no confidence in the processes that the minister supposedly says he has in place and given that ranchers, conservationists, and a range of experts in different fields are very concerned about the potential impacts of coal mining and given that the concerns about high selenium concentration in the Elk River in British Columbia have raised concerns about coal mining in Alberta, can the minister guarantee Albertans that there will be no such concerns here in Alberta, not now and not ever?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the process that's in place is not my process. It's the same process that's been in place in this province for many years. It was the same process that was in place under the former NDP government, of which that member was a cabinet minister. So if he had concerns about the process, I would suggest, through you to him, that he should have taken that opportunity while he was in government to change it. It seems that at the time, though, they did have confidence in the Alberta Energy

Regulator and the federal regulator to look at these issues. To be clear, all environmental rules when it comes to water remain in place. The regulator is looking at each project and will make decisions based on environmental regulations.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that water quality is nothing to be messed with and given that in many places water quality has been affected in the long term by coal mining and given that Albertans are particularly concerned about the impacts that coal mining will have on the Oldman River and given that we increasingly hear rumours that the government is planning to make changes to the Oldman River basin to accommodate coal mining and given that this is not only hugely concerning; it's also not what Albertans want, can the minister here and now guarantee Albertans that he has no plans to make any adjustments in the Oldman River basin to accommodate coal mining?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the reason that Albertans are hearing rumours is because that hon. member is starting the rumours.

Here is the reality. The Alberta Energy Regulator and the federal regulator are looking at the projects that he's referring to, Mr. Speaker. They were looking at the projects while he was a member of government, not when he was in the opposition. It is a robust process. All environmental rules remain in place. We trust the regulator to do their job. All Albertans will be able to have an opportunity to participate in the regulatory process, and we'll see what the regulator determines. But I can assure Albertans that all environmental rules remain in place.

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

COVID-19 Protective Measures and Economic Recovery

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, October 30, the Premier took to social media and said, "Alberta will not lockdown." That's a big promise to Alberta families and businesses, but unfortunately the Premier isn't taking any action to follow through. The NDP opposition proposed a reasonable, six-point plan of nonrestrictive measures that will help to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but instead of taking proactive steps to prevent a lockdown, the Premier just blames Albertans. When will he take responsibility for the office he holds and take action to protect Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said last week when I was asked this very same question, the NDP are yelling at us to do exactly what we are already doing. We are already hiring more contact tracers and will soon get to 1,100 contract tracers. We're leading the country in contact tracing. There are some provinces who have given up on contact tracing. We continue to make sure that our turnaround times for testing are such that we can react very quickly to the pandemic. We're going to continue to make sure that our testing system has the capacity to get us through the winter season and continue to make sure that we're leaders in our response to the pandemic.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pretty sure my tone is not yelling if anybody most of the time can't hear me.

Given that I was actually asking about the economy and given that daily numbers are four and a half times higher than they were

on Labour Day and rising fast and given that the Premier's only response has been some weak catchphrases like we have to "up our game" and "knock it off," when will Alberta families and businesses see the leadership they deserve from this provincial government around the economy and the real action to reduce case numbers and prevent a future lockdown?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we've done. We made sure that the measures that we announced last week, they're targeted, they're focused, they're narrow, and they're going to minimize business disruption. That's exactly what Albertans want and what they're supporting this government in doing in our reaction in response to the pandemic, to make sure that the measures that we do implement are always going to be focused, narrow, targeted, and minimizing business disruption.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. They're definitely narrow. They're not expansive to help Alberta businesses during a potential lockdown.

Given that many Alberta businesses will not survive another lockdown and this would push thousands of more Albertans into unemployment and given that we have known for months that a second wave of COVID-19 could arrive and it would likely be even worse than the first wave, why has this government been so slow to prepare, and when will the Premier stop sleepwalking into this second wave and do something to support the economy?

The Speaker: I know that the hon. Opposition House Leader is very familiar with what a preamble is or isn't. That certainly was an example of one. I encourage you not to use them in the future.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Slow to respond? We began in January to be able to make sure that, unlike other provinces and other places throughout the world, we didn't have a problem in being able to procure our PPE, that we didn't have a shortage of ventilators, that we didn't have a shortage of beds. Slow to react? We've actually been, I think, global leaders in our response to the pandemic. And now she's asking for us to have broad restrictions. She can't, on one hand, say that we need broad restrictions that are going to impact businesses and say that we need to support these businesses. She's calling for us to disrupt these businesses with broad restrictions. That's exactly what we're not going to do. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Prussian Carp

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prussian carp have invaded the Red Deer River watershed and other Alberta waterways. They are an invasive species that multiply very rapidly, laying eggs up to three times a year. The Prussian carp is a very aggressive species and threatens to displace Alberta's native fish stocks. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks advise the citizens of my riding what plans his ministry has to protect and preserve our native species against this intrusive invader?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, removing Prussian carp in established areas is very difficult. Our focus is on preventing future spread and minimizing the impacts where we do have spread. Education and outreach are often our best strategies. We need

Albertans to understand that these are invasive species, we need them to report occurrences when they see them, and, most importantly, we need Albertans not to release Prussian carp into our waters. As well, if Albertans catch a Prussian carp, we ask that they report it to Alberta Environment and Parks through our invasive species hotline. We ask that they then immediately kill it and dispose of it appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that many Albertans actually enjoy eating this rapidly expanding species of freshwater fish and given that unrestricted catching of these fish may contribute to the depopulation of invasive carp and save our native species, could the minister comment on whether or not an aggressive fishing strategy, possibly under the salvage fishing regulation or other, would help to contain the spread of this invasive species?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it certainly could help, but angling alone will not be enough to be able to deal with invasive species like Prussian carp. We need Albertans to understand not to release invasive species into our systems. It causes significant impacts for recreation on our lakes. It also causes economic impacts for irrigation systems, water systems, and wastewater systems all across the province. Yes, angling can help as long as they dispose of the fish appropriately, but, most importantly, we need to understand that we cannot spread invasive species across our province.

Mr. Orr: Given that both Gull Lake and Buffalo Lake have depended upon a water level stabilization program that pumps water from the Red Deer River to the lakes in dry years and given that that program has now been suspended due to the presence of Prussian carp in the river and given that the future sustainability of these lakes and their ecosystems may now be at risk, can the same minister inform this House on the government's plan to maintain the substantial recreational, economic, and environmental value of these central Alberta lakes?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working with the Gull Lake water society on that very issue in the hon. member's riding and mine with Gull Lake in central Alberta. He's right. We haven't been able to pump water into the lake through the Alberta Environment and Parks pump system because Prussian carp are within the pump system. That hon. member brought us a solution. We've been working on a new net solution that we are piloting in that area. The testing has gone well. The Premier and I were able to visit with the hon. member just this summer. If this works, it will be able to help impact the Prussian carp problem all across the province. I want to thank the hon. member for his hard work on this important file.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

First Nations Police Services

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was thrilled to hear that Lakeshore's own First Nations police service, the Lakeshore Regional Police Service, will finally be receiving the recognition they have long deserved. They have been stewards of our community, and to have them legitimized through Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, is welcome news. Given that the Lakeshore Regional Police Service has been operating in my constituency since 2008, helping those living within indigenous

communities that they serve across Lesser Slave Lake, to the minister: will these changes impact how First Nation police operate in Alberta?

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

2:40

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Member for Lesser Slave Lake. Alberta's government is committed to supporting the women and men of our law enforcement. That's exactly why we tabled Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, to support the Blood Tribe police, the Lakeshore regional police, and the Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service. It would allow them to benefit from the review of the Police Act. This sets the chief of police for Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service, Chief Blake, on the same footing with that of Chief McFee and Chief Neufeld of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the Lakeshore Regional Police Service was established by collaborative efforts between the Lakeshore Regional Police Commission, the RCMP, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, and the federal aboriginal policing directorate, there are many levels of governance, and given that First Nation policing is not yet recognized federally, to the minister: do these changes have any impact on the jurisdiction of the Lakeshore Regional Police Service?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be no changes in jurisdiction for the Lakeshore Regional Police Service, nor would this impact the ability of any other First Nation police service to keep their communities safe. These changes will not impact the ability or jurisdiction of any police services to keep our communities and people safe. In the future new police services will not be impaired by this, either, nor would they require specific legislated amendments to bring them under the umbrella of this legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the minister. Given that First Nation policing has some significant differences and new officers may not fully understand regional cultural issues that exist in the Lesser Slave Lake region, further given that the Police Act review is still under way, to the minister: how is the ministry working to ensure that hiring and staff retention are maintained or improved for First Nation police services?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. By tabling Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, we are confirming the important role that our First Nation police services and commission play to keep our communities and people safe. We will continue to work with the federal government and our First Nation partners to make sure that they have all the tools they need to keep their communities safe.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 45, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2), sponsored by the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time, as I rose yesterday, I do have a point of privilege pursuant to Standing Order 15(2). I have the requisite copies. Would you like me to read it into the record now or wait? Okay.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. Can you go ahead and read it into the record?

Ms Sweet: Yup.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm writing under Standing Order 15(2) to give notice that I intend to raise a matter of privilege at the appropriate time during the daily Routine. I will provide a fulsome argument in the House, but I will be contending that by moving Government Motion 29 during the time set aside for private members' business on Monday afternoon, by Standing Order 8(1), and preventing the sponsor of the next motion other than a government motion next in precedence on the Order Paper from moving a motion under 8(1.2), the member of the Executive Council who moved the motion, and by extension the government, breached the privileges of private members of this Assembly and the constituents whom they were elected to represent. This notice is being provided to you in accordance with the provision of Standing Order 15 in advance of the daily Routine for November 3, 2020, at our earliest opportunity to address the matter.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation

Bill 43

Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 43, the Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act.

This bill will allow the government to establish a user fee to finance certain highway and road construction projects and that the fee will be eliminated when a project has been paid for.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a first time]

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

Bill 44

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 44, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

Madam Speaker, this legislation amends seven other pieces of legislation to reduce red tape for financial sector job creators while improving the resilience of Alberta's financial institutions. Our discussions with industry stakeholders made it clear that there are many legislative and regulatory shortcomings that get in the way of the efficient function of this province's financial sector. Those consultations together with the COVID-19 pandemic have shown us gaps, limitations, and unnecessary red tape that are holding job creators and financial institutions back. This bill will improve Alberta's regulatory environment and the competitiveness of Alberta's financial sector. It will help Alberta attract much-needed investment and job creation in support of our economic recovery plan, and it will balance the government's commitment to responsible oversight of Alberta's financial institutions with their need to compete and evolve. A more competitive financial services sector will grow the economy and benefit all Albertans.

I hereby move first reading of Bill 44.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have two tablings today, that I'll be happy to leave in the basket on my way out. They're both from folks who are writing in with concerns about changes to curriculum as proposed specifically under the leadership of Mr. Champion. They're from Marlene Nelson as well as Jeanette Thiessen.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? Oh. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Sorry.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know I'm short. I'm hard to see. I ask your patience. I want to table some documents that I referred to in debate in second reading of Bill 39 last night. I said that I would table them at my soonest opportunity, so I'm doing so now. I will be brief.

I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of the submission to the Child Care Licensing Act regulation review by the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta titled *Getting It Right*, dated February 2020.

I'd also like to table five copies of the submission, dated June 30, 2020, from the Childcare Association for Resources to Administrators.

I'd also like to table five copies of the Alberta Early Learning and Care Leaders Caucus submission, dated July 5, 2020.

I will also table five copies of the submission by the Alberta Family Child Care Association, dated July 3, 2020.

I will table five copies of the Children First: Community Child Care Network Society submission, dated July 2020.

Five copies of the Public Interest Alberta submission to the regulatory review, dated July 15, 2020.

Five copies of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care submission, dated June 12, 2020.

Five copies of the submission of the YMCAs in Alberta, dated June 17, 2020.

Five copies of the submission of the Muttart Foundation, dated June 24, 2020.

Five copies of the submission of the Get Outside and Play society, dated 2020.

Five copies of the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention submission, dated July 2020.

Five copies of the report to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General in the Woolfsmith fatality inquiry, dated November 26, 2018.

Five copies of the response from the Ministry of Children's Services to the Woolfsmith fatality inquiry report, dated September 25, 2019.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies – in response to bizarre statements by the Member for Calgary-Peigan and the Minister of Children's Services that I did not submit anything to the child care licensing regulation review, these are my submissions, dated June 12, 2020, submitted to the Minister of Children's Services as well as e-mails to the now Minister of Municipal Affairs, who was leading the consultation review, an e-mail exchange dated July 7, 2020, as well as the copies of my submission as a parent to the online survey, dated July 5, 2020.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll leave those copies in the basket.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from executive director Momin Saeed of the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council. Knowing that today is the U.S. election, the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council is very concerned with violence that arises from white supremacy and is calling on our government to do as much as it possibly can to be extra vigilant and cautious, specifically around mosques, gurdwaras, synagogues, and other places of gathering for community worship. This is something that's very concerning to me and to many of the members of this side.

The Speaker: I appreciate the importance of the issue. I might encourage you to use a member's statement as opposed to a tabling if that's what your intention is.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, very briefly, very appropriate. On October 28 the Member for Edmonton-South asked me about the Calgary cancer centre fire safety system subcontractors . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. What are you about to table? Are you tabling *Hansard* or an actual document?

Mr. Panda: No. During QP the Member for Edmonton-South asked me a certain question about the Calgary cancer centre fire safety system subcontractors.

The Speaker: I'm happy to have you table the document. You don't need to explain everything about the document or the circumstances around the document. That's not the purpose of tablings. If you noticed the way that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud tabled her documents, there was no context, just what the documents are. That's the purpose of tablings. I just reprimanded the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. You can tell me what the document is, but you have less than five seconds to do it.

Mr. Panda: Sure. As I assured the House that I'll get the answer, today I got the answer. The Calgary cancer centre is built in compliance with all the safety rules, and I have the paper here.

The Speaker: I appreciate that, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-South will be able to read those answers in the tabling.

Are there any others?

Seeing none, I have one. I have a tabling pursuant to section 6(3) of the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I'm tabling the six requisite copies of the October 2020 evaluation summary report for the office of the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities.

Hon. members, during the daily Routine the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader rose and provided notice of a point of privilege. I call upon her now.

Privilege

Private Members' Business

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can you please just confirm how much time I get? Ten minutes?

The Speaker: You have the time that the Speaker determines to be a reasonable amount of time for you to make your point. I have seen a wide variety of times used to do this. I encourage you to do it as expeditiously as possible, but you have the opportunity to make your case.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I am rising on a point of privilege. Pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) this morning I provided written notice to your office at 11:23 a.m., and a copy was also provided to the Government House Leader. It was my intention to raise a point of privilege today on the issue that by moving Government Motion 29 during the time set aside for private members' business on Monday afternoon by Standing Order 8(1) and by preventing the sponsor of the motion other than a government motion next in precedence on the Order Paper from moving a motion under (1.2) – I won't read it again into the record. However, the notice was provided to you in accordance with the provision of the standing orders.

First off, I'd like to reference page 58, chapter 3 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

The origins of the privileges enjoyed by the House of Commons in the United Kingdom were a product of a direct and real threat from the Crown and the House of Lords. As the threat subsided, the thrust of the history of privilege has been towards defining [the] rights and immunities [for elected members] more narrowly, reflecting the reality that all privileges enjoyed by the House and its Members ultimately derive from the electorate. The privileges of the Canadian House of Commons were inherited from the United Kingdom without the need to overcome physical threats and challenges . . . [enabling] the institution of Parliament to flourish and individual Members to fulfill the functions for which they were elected.

The classic definition for parliamentary privilege is found in *Ersine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 24th edition, page 203.

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of certain rights enjoyed by each House collectively . . . and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals.

On page 724, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, under Private Members' Bills:

A private Member's bill is the text of a legislative initiative submitted to Parliament by a Member who is neither a Minister, nor a Parliamentary Secretary, nor the Speaker . . . the Deputy Speaker for approval, and possibly for amendment . . . Most but not all bills of this type originate in the House of Commons. Debate on private Members' bills can take place only during the time set aside for Private Members' Business.

The history around privilege and its contemporary definition is all about making sure that all of these elected by the electorate have

adequate opportunity to represent their constituents, bring forward to the Legislature issues that are important to their electorate, and be able to do so whether or not they're part of the Crown, Executive Council, or the government. Recognizing that this is a privilege and of critical importance for discharge of individual members' responsibilities, most Legislatures in Canada have well-established rules and process to make sure all members of the Legislature are able to effectively participate in legislative processes and be able to fulfill the functions they're elected to discharge as members.

In Alberta the Speaker's office takes the time set aside for private members' business seriously. We have a tradition in this place to have names drawn for the order of when private members' bills can be introduced and motions. This is done with all private members' names being entered into a draw to ensure that the privilege of having a motion or a bill is done in a fair and transparent way and without influence from the government. I respect that process, Mr. Speaker, and believe that all private members in this Chamber should be able to exercise their rights as elected officials in bringing forward ideas through bills and motions.

In the case of the Alberta Legislature, set out in Standing Order 8(1), the following is read: "On Monday afternoon, after the daily routine, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows: . . . Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders."

In addition, the recent changes to the standing orders, Government Motion 40, which was tabled October 21, made at the beginning of the fall session, indicated the following:

- (c) in Standing Order 8
 - (i) in suborder (1.2) by striking out "the Assembly may grant unanimous consent to proceed to an additional Motion other than a Government Motion or to any other item of business that is not yet due for consideration by the Assembly" and substituting "the Assembly may consider the motion other than a Government motion that is next in precedence on the Order Paper on passage of a motion made by the sponsor of that motion other than a Government motion";
 - (ii) by adding the following after suborder (1.2):
 - (1.3) A motion made in accordance with suborder (1.2) to proceed to the motion other than a Government motion that is next in precedence on the Order Paper may be made without notice and is . . . subject to debate or amendment.

These changes were passed in this Chamber only a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that a specific time is set aside to preserve the private members' right to participate in and be able to discharge their functions and to ensure private business can be dealt with in this Chamber in an orderly fashion.

The new standing orders clearly stated that if a private member's motion was dealt with, another member's private motion could be called. Mr. Speaker, no such opportunity was granted yesterday. Instead, what we saw was a move to quash a private member's motion, and then the government, using their authority of Executive Council to call a government motion, walked roughshod over private members' rights and privileges and ignored the parliamentary practice and traditions of this place, the very standing orders that govern this place, that Monday afternoons are, in fact, set aside for private members' business.

This is not new for the government, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we have seen other standing order changes made by this government to impede any type of private members' business going forward. In fact, the government, as we know – and the Crown, as we know, that in fact is the cabinet, is appointed by the Lieutenant Governor or on behalf of the Queen – has gone so far as to set up another

legislative committee to vet a private member's bill should it be allowed to come or be heard at this Chamber. The changes to the standing orders and, in fact, the creation of the private members' committee also impede the abilities of private members to execute their privileges and responsibilities to the electorate. In essence, this government has created red tape to prevent private members' business from coming to this Chamber, undermining the parliamentary privilege of private members. It is the stance that this government has chosen to take, and that is to quiet the voices of private members in this Chamber, to remove their voices altogether.

3:00

I will point out that there were private members on both sides of the Chamber, all of whom have been elected by their constituents to speak on their behalf and amplify the concerns of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the government has in fact returned to the behaviour that historically created the issue of privilege to begin with, that being that the Crown wanted to have overall authority and influence on the business of the Chamber and legislators that were duly elected. It is a steep, steep slope we are on when a government rejects and changes the very standing orders that are in place to protect the rights and privileges of private members in this Chamber.

The evidence is clear, Mr. Speaker. The government used the standing orders to benefit themselves in adjourning debate on private Motion 511. It was done with clear intention. How do we know? Here are the facts. On Monday afternoon, November 2, private members' business was called in Committee of the Whole, with 14 minutes remaining allowed for debate on private member's Bill 204. That bill passed Committee of the Whole. Traditionally unanimous consent would be requested to allow third reading of the same bill to occur that day. However, a decision was made by the government to call Motion 511.

The introducing member was permitted to speak, a member opposite in the government responded, and this was as far as the debate was allowed to go. The government caucus member used Standing Order 8(4) to push the motion to the bottom of the Order Paper, which any other member is entitled to do – that is part of the standing orders – but what the government did not do was to call another private member's motion, as set out in our new standing orders. Instead, the government used the time to call their own Government Motion 29, having a minister speak and move it on behalf of the Premier, and then to immediately adjourn.

Now, you would think, given that it's private members' business, that the government would at least have allowed a private member to speak to the government motion, but they did not. They used their majority to adjourn, also something that they are able to do. However, here's the confusion, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader then requested unanimous consent to revert to private members' business and go back to Bill 204. Obviously, based on that decision alone, the call by the Government House Leader clearly demonstrated that the government was aware that Monday afternoons are intended for private members' business and that, in fact, there are mechanisms within the standing orders to allow for moving through stages of bills to occur. So when they called Government Motion 29, the Government House Leader actually knew he was breaching the privileges of private members to continue on with their private members' business.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, the government may say that all the private members' business was done for the day, which was why Government Motion 29 was called, but again this is incorrect. As I indicated earlier, under a new government motion that was passed only a few weeks ago, another private member's motion could have been called. However, again, this option was not provided to the private members. The motion was not called, nor was a member

able to even give notice and move forward on debate. It was a clear violation of the standing orders.

Now, there are new standing orders, Mr. Speaker, and mistakes are made. However, the Government House Leader wrote them, he tabled them, and they were on the Order Paper, so he was aware of those changes. He could have planned accordingly. The Government House Leader's decision to call a government motion, to use up that time that is specifically set aside for private members for his own government business, is a breach of privilege, not only of the member whose motion was adjourned but also of the member who did not get his private member's bill passed yesterday and of all private members in this Chamber who were not able to speak to private members' business.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Monday afternoons are set out in the standing orders and have traditionally in this place always been set aside for private members' business. The actions that were demonstrated by the Government House Leader, in fact, breached the very traditions and practices of this place and, in doing so, breached the privileges of all private members in this Chamber. It is a breach of privilege not only of the member whose motion was adjourned but, again, of the member whose private member's motion was not passed and, again, of the member who didn't get to call their motion.

The Government House Leader has the power, Mr. Speaker. I'm very aware of that. However, to change standing orders, to continuously limit the amount of time that private members have: it's not democracy. What we saw yesterday was not democracy. It was Executive Council using its powers to ignore the very rights of the members of this Chamber to be able to debate and to bring forward ideas on behalf of the electorate. The government may not like those ideas and may want to stop those ideas from being shared, but that is the fundamental right of freedom of speech, and every member in this Chamber must be protected and be allowed to use that right.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, let us all remember why privilege is defined for elected members. Privilege dates back to the 16th century, when a Member of Parliament was arrested for proposing a bill to alleviate working conditions in a mine. Interference by the government, either directly or through bodies empowered by the government, with members continued for hundreds of years, and privilege developed to protect the lives of the elected and the soul of democracy. Privilege, in its modern iteration, is designed to encourage debate and liberate the legislative branch from the overbearance of the executive branch.

Mr. Speaker, private members' business is only three hours a week. I would hope that the Government House Leader and the executive branch will learn they have to share their privilege and stop removing it from the rest of us.

The Speaker: Hon. members, traditionally the Government House Leader is provided the opportunity to respond. He may choose, having just heard the arguments, to respond tomorrow, which would also be a reasonable course to take.

Hon. Government House Leader, would you like to respond?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity. I do want to note, first of all, that the Member for Edmonton-Manning not only seems to be accusing the government of a point of privilege but specifically the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, and in her comments now it appears to be the Government House Leader, i.e. myself. Yet by the appearance of the notice she provided and communications I've received from the minister, I can tell you myself that she did not make her intentions known to the minister or myself that she was intending to bring forward a point of privilege about him or me. This is a gross

violation of past practices of this Assembly. In fact, it may amount to contempt of the Assembly, and I would have expected better from her given that she ran to be Speaker and claimed that she would protect the privileges of members of this Assembly.

At the outset, let me suggest that the Official Opposition House Leader has a confused idea of how yesterday's proceedings occurred and how the standing orders apply. I'm also willing to cut some slack since this change to the standing orders has not been practised yet. Hopefully, the Assembly can indulge me as I outline the process and how it applied yesterday.

As was proposed in Government Motion 40, a change to the standing orders was made, Mr. Speaker, by striking out "the Assembly may grant unanimous consent to proceed to an additional Motion other than a Government Motion or to any other item of business that is not yet due for consideration by the Assembly" and substituting "the Assembly may consider the motion other than a Government motion that is next in precedence on the Order Paper on passage of a motion made by the sponsor of that motion other than a Government motion"

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in order for Motion other than Government Motion 512 to have proceeded, following the vote on moving Motion 511 to the bottom of the Order Paper, the MLA for Edmonton-Meadows would have had to stand up immediately following the division to move his motion pursuant to Standing Order 8(1.2) that the Assembly proceed to consideration of Motion 512 on the Order Paper. To my knowledge, this was not done, and therefore pursuant to Standing Order 8(1.1) the Assembly moved to government business, and the government pursuant to the authority of Standing Order 9(2) called Government Motion 29, as it was eligible to do under the standing orders and the rules of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I would further point out to you that the Government House Leader and nobody from Executive Council is responsible for calling on anybody in the Chamber. That falls to you, and you or whoever was in the chair at the moment would have presumably noted if somebody had risen and would have acknowledged it.

Now, if the Official Opposition House Leader is arguing that the MLA for Edmonton-Meadows was in the Chamber following the division, that seems unlikely because when I review the Votes and Proceedings from yesterday's sitting, I do not see his name listed as having participated in that vote.

Standing Order 8(1.2) also is very clear that only the sponsor of the motion other than a government motion next in precedence on the Order Paper can move the motion that the Assembly consider that item. It seems to me that the Official Opposition was asleep at the switch – it's happened before with them in private members' business – and they were not prepared to have the MLA for Edmonton-Meadows move the necessary motion, Mr. Speaker.

I will also point out that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows' motion has not disappeared from the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker, and will be scheduled to proceed inside this Chamber, so the argument that members will not be able to debate that motion is flawed as well.

3:10

In light of this, Mr. Speaker, I fail to see how any private members' rights were infringed. In summary, I want to draw your attention to an example from 2013, the last time that the NDP thought the rules of the Assembly offended them. That time they were discussing the application of time allocation. In making the ruling in 2013, the then Deputy Speaker made the following remarks. I will refer you to pages 3316 to 3317 of *Alberta Hansard* for December 3, 2013.

It is untenable that a prima facie case of breach of privilege could arise by the application of the Assembly's own rules.

I would draw your attention, hon. members, to *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, the second edition, at page 223. This is under the heading Where the Answer is Contained in Rules or Practice of House.

In deciding whether there is a prima facie case, the Speaker excludes any matters that are otherwise properly to be dealt with under the practice or Standing Orders of the House. That is to say, where the answer to the alleged "question of privilege" is contained in the rules or the practice of the House, it would unlikely involve breach of the privileges of Members.

Hon. members, your Speaker does not have the liberty to reinvent the application of the rules, the standing orders, on the fly. These are your rules.

I would urge you, Mr. Speaker, to conclude, as previous Speakers in this Assembly have concluded, that a breach of privilege cannot be found when the only complaint is that the Official Opposition doesn't like the rules of the Assembly now that they no longer possess the majority.

The Speaker: Hon. members, given that this point of privilege raised by the hon. Official Opposition House Leader specifically relates to private members' business, I am willing to entertain if there are other members wishing to speak. I see the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has risen.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak in favour of this being a matter of privilege. Private members' business: it's too important and it's too limited to be interfered with. There are 87 of us. We each represent 45,000 or 50,000 Albertans. Together we represent 4.2 million Albertans that need their voices heard. Those three hours on a Monday: that's our right; that's our privilege. That's sacrosanct for us to have the opportunity to say what's important to Albertans, to our constituents, and to people that have spent the time and the effort to make us aware of key things that need to be addressed.

How important it is, as outlined by one of my colleagues, the three hours on a Monday. As you know, for some reason we miss a lot of Mondays. We don't have a lot of opportunity for this. Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very grateful, for almost nine years, to be able to represent the people of Cypress-Medicine Hat. In nine years I have had one private member's bill and, I think, one motion. I've had two opportunities to stand up and present what is crucial to the families and the people of Cypress-Medicine Hat. What happened yesterday interfered with the opportunity of one of my colleagues, one of the 87 of us, to do that.

Mr. Speaker, you were put in that chair for a number of reasons. I know, in my opinion, how good you are at this and how important it is to you. When I thought about this, in court, in law there's a court called the Chancery court or the court of equity. What the court of equity does is that instead of using the principles of laws, instead of using all the rules, it looks at the principles of equity. I believe that the rules fit, that this is a matter of principle, and 87 private members, the 62 or 63 of us that aren't part of the government, deserve our chance for those 10 minutes to talk. I also think that the equity is a huge consideration in this.

Mr. Speaker, I'm asking you to not turn 62 private members into well-paid extras, but give us the chance to talk for our constituents. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, the Speaker is not prepared to rule. I will at least take an evening to consider the arguments.

One thing I will say, though, is that the Speaker is merely a humble servant of the Assembly. While members might like the Speaker to use his own discretion, he is guided by the rules of the Assembly and the documents and reference materials that are before him. I will say that the Speaker has a strong passion for defending the rights of private members as I have been one and believe in the institution of our democracy and passionately believe in the strength of our Assembly, but my ruling will be guided by the precedent that is before us, the standing orders we have all agreed to, and the reference books that we all turn to. With that, I will report back to the Assembly at my earliest convenience.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 38

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

[Debate adjourned October 29: Member Loyola speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are debating Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has six minutes remaining should he choose to use them.

Seeing none, I see that a bunch of you are standing, but it looks like only the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo wants to join in the debate at this point. The hon. member has the call.

Member Ceci: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to address Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, for the first time. You know, the kinds of things that I plan to address in my review of the information that's before us with regard to the bill probably are not the same things that a lawyerly person will pick out from the bill. Nonetheless, I think they are important issues, and I want to take the opportunity to share my thoughts with all of the collected MLAs in the Legislature today. Of course, we all here support justice, justice for all, justice not being delayed, and we need a good justice system so that the many issues that are present in our society can have adjudication in some way.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

One of the first things I want to talk about, of course, is one of the six parts of this act that are looking for changes, and that is on indigenous policing services. I think back to earlier today in question period. There was an exchange between two members of the House talking about this very topic, indigenous policing services. It was quite useful to hear the exchange because it informed my thinking, and of course my thinking is that these First Nations police service entities – three of them are talked about in this bill – have been around for a long, long time. They have been doing the job on their nations for their peoples, and what this bill does is it talks about those services and their ability to be respected by the justice system. Of course, we know about the importance of self-governance amongst First Nations all across this country and in this province. The parts of this bill that look to legitimize those three First Nation policing services are certainly okay. It's great.

I think there are some issues, of course, and I didn't hear the complete affirmation of who's going to be picking up the costs of those indigenous policing services. Certainly, the federal government needs to be involved, but will there be gaps in monies towards those First Nation policing services or not? Will they have the full range of efforts under the law to guide them and to be able to utilize on their nation? Those are questions, I think, that are still

unresolved for me. As I'm not a member of a First Nation, of course, or a community, I think many people who are members of those communities would be quite interested in the full range of First Nations policing and the services that they have. That would be the first thing. I think that's a great, great initiative and one that I support.

3:20

The other parts, of course, under this act that are getting addressed, if I can just point to them quickly, include the important issues around referendums and municipalities in this province. I have the responsibility and pleasure to be a member of the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee. It's chaired by a member of the government who is here. We've been working through many issues.

One of them is citizens' initiatives. Citizens' initiatives are the precursor to referendums happening in municipalities, a precursor to municipalities potentially holding referendums. I just want to point out that the information that's come forward, almost a consensus, Madam Speaker, is that those actions would be better held, meaning referendums, not at the municipal level or the local government level but in conjunction with other elections provincially or special elections provincially. That's something that, as I say, was almost a consensus behind it.

It certainly was with the associations representing 383 different municipalities, counties, and MDs throughout the province, meaning the RMA and the AUMA. Their letters are quite specific. They believe that potential referendums triggered by citizens' initiatives should not take place at the local level, specifically things like the announced intentions of the government to hold Senate elections and a referendum in conjunction with, potentially, equalization. Their view is that local authority elections should be maintained for the purpose of local issues. Their point is that both of those things, senatorial elections generally and a referendum on equalization, are not local issues because they have no ability to influence the whole issue of equalization. That's a matter that under the Constitution a number of provinces can address together, but local governments aren't provinces.

While the provincial government may get input from citizens through utilizing local elections, that's not the wish and the will of those 383 municipalities, MDs, counties, and summer villages. They want to be respected, and they have questions that I certainly do, too, with regard to: what about those increased municipal costs that come as a result of ballots needing to be put out and collected and counted, advertising needing to take place, and the results of which have to – you know, the ballot count has to be above board and not be challenged at all. So they have to put people in place. They have to hire people. They have to hire places to make sure that there's somewhere for citizens to go.

They, both the AUMA and RMA, have letters that have been submitted to that committee that I'm on that we read and took into account. I would argue that we didn't take them into account enough because the views of both of these associations, that have been place for over 100 years in this province, weren't acceded to or weren't agreed to.

That's the letter from RMA, and I just want to point to the letter from AUMA. It's briefer but still speaks to this issue on the Referendum Act, that's part of this bill that's before us, and it says, "AUMA recommends that votes on provincial and federal matters not be held in conjunction with municipal elections at all in the future."

They wrote a joint letter to the previous Minister of Justice and Solicitor General in May of 2020 expressing their concerns about the government of Alberta's plan to hold, as I said, a Senate election and a referendum in conjunction with local elections in 2021. To

date they've not received a reply from the new Minister of Justice on this matter.

Why is it important to keep local elections for local purposes? As you'll see from the submissions, they believe they've got enough on their plate, Madam Speaker, and they don't want additional items on their plate right now. We know that they have significant concerns, particularly rural municipalities, around policing costs in their communities. They have the downloading of policing costs to address with their local tax base, and it's going to be stretched and probably pretty impossible for some municipalities to meet those costs without significant changes to their programs at the local level, which means that citizens get less service in other areas to pay for something like policing costs.

They also want their elections to continue to be nonpartisan in nature, a tradition in this province that's been there for a significant period of time. Certainly, when I was first elected, in '95, it was there for decades and decades and decades before me, the nonpartisan involvement at the local municipal levels. With these changes that are proposed in Bill 38, the view of the associations that represent, as I say, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of councillors across this province: they want their elections to continue to be nonpartisan. With the introduction of referenda there will be third-party advertising, there will be views taken on either side of issues, and the view is that that's going to politicize local elections in ways that were never wanted.

You know, I just think that with the bills that have been passed of late in the spring session here by this government, local elections in 2021 are not going to be the same as local elections in that 100 and some years of governance in this province by local governance. It's going to be partisan. There are going to be people who stand up and say that they're the UCP candidate, and they'll be backed by third-party advertisers. We know that in local elections the amount of contributions to any candidate is \$5,000 now, and as one minister says: you know, it's only a \$1,000 different than when you were in government. Well, that's not true, Madam Speaker. It is up to \$5,000, as many times as you want to contribute across this province. That's what's going to make a big difference in upcoming local elections. There will be partisan views held by different candidates, and those different candidates will get a whole lot of money, up to \$5,000, from many, many people who want to get their point of view supported.

3:30

So those are the two parts that I'm really concerned about, of course. I know that my colleagues will address other parts of this bill, but this specific area of changes to local government I'm most concerned with, having been a city alderman or city councillor for 15 years, having not had a party card ever during that period of time, and having believed that I worked in the best interests of all of the constituents in my riding.

There were from time to time Senate elections foisted on the local election process, and I can remember, you know, wondering why that was there. I mean, as I said, it's costly for the municipalities. They have to put people in place. They have to put processes in place. It takes away from the focus of the local government issues, the local issues that are present in that community, and we have a lot of local issues all across this province that are important. The growth of Calgary and Edmonton in particular comes up repeatedly.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to be able to speak on Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, at second reading. Now, this year has been a tumultuous year, to say the least. Everyone in this House has felt the effects of COVID-19, and that's led to a shifting of our landscape and Alberta's landscapes as we have learned to deal with this COVID-19, especially in this House with regard to looking at: how can we modernize, how can we move forward through COVID-19 and into a way to do business here that will serve the people of Alberta in the middle of a pandemic?

Now more than ever we've had to depend on technology. We've had to accept that it truly does help us to be efficient. Even for somebody like myself, who has a few years under his belt and maybe is not as trusting of technology, I've had to come to realize that it can help us. It can help us be more efficient and effective and move us forward into perhaps a new, modern way of doing the business of the people of Alberta in this Legislature.

Now, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act proposes changes and several amendments to pieces of legislation that will help us to modernize our justice system, and these changes are going to ensure that the legislation and its regulations are relevant in an ever-changing world that 2020 and the years to come will present to us in this Legislature and to the people of Alberta.

Our first step towards modernization is acknowledging in this piece of legislation the valuable role of First Nations policing in our province. The Police Act was originally enacted in 1988, and it has not changed since 1988. As such, the First Nations policing program, created in 1991, was not included in this act. Current legislation ensures that First Nations police services are subject to civilian oversight and that they must comply with provincial guidelines. However, there is no specific recognition of them in legislation. These proposed changes are integral to ensure that any changes to the Police Act in the future will also apply to First Nations policing as well. First Nations police officers do great work and better understand their communities and culture than many of us ever could. By introducing this legislation, we take another step forward in our efforts for reconciliation and creating a prosperous and a safe future for our First Nations in Alberta.

We as a government are also committed to continuing the larger job of reviewing the Police Act and making sure that the police remain accountable and responsive to the needs of their communities and the citizens that they serve.

We are also embracing modernization in more practical ways such as making changes to the Jury Act and changes to the provincial procedures act to allow more Albertans to access the justice system through the use of technology. You know, the world has changed in sometimes truly profound ways since these pieces of legislation were created or last updated. We can use technology to make our lives easier and our jobs more efficient, and it's time that our justice system, which is absolutely critical and important to the very fabric of our society, also follows suit.

Proposed changes to the Jury Act allow for the utilization of advances in technology and would give the courts more flexibility, making jury selection more efficient and therefore more effective. Examples of this would include juror summons being able to be sent by electronic means, removing the need to use a regulated juror summons form. This would allow for flexibility, and it would allow the form to be quickly adapted when it is needed.

Although COVID-19 brought with it many challenges, it has shaped the way many businesses and individuals conduct their day-to-day activities. These changes, especially the move toward virtual and online options, have begun to dominate our society as we stay physically distant from each other. I can attest personally, Madam

Speaker, that I was a little leery when it came to our attention that we would not be able to attend church physically – it's been a part of my life for many, many years, and I've grown to love the people in the congregation that I attend – that to not come together physically was going to seriously impact our capacity to worship and to live in community, yet I was pleasantly surprised.

As our church set up the cameras and got the computing equipment, we were able to start first by Zooming in together as a congregation. We had people doing special music from their living rooms as we watched on our computers. We had people praying from their houses corporately, as a body, over the computer in Zoom. We had the capacity to visit before and after on the computer, and it meant that we still experienced that community that comes from being a part of a church family. The technology really helped us move forward in what would have been a significantly difficult time for our church families and for my family, for my wife and I, not to be a part of that congregation that we've grown to love. This technology was able to help us move together and to go across that physical distancing that was the result of COVID-19.

Madam Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to be able to see that in this piece of legislation we're going to be adapting and using the technology to help us move forward and to deliver justice and our capacity to have the justice system work efficiently. Changes to the provincial procedures act will allow Albertans to do things like participate in trials and hearings by video conferencing or by telephone. They would allow the entering of pleas, the setting of trial dates, the requesting of adjournments all to be done by telephone or by e-mail or by other electronic means instead of going to court in person.

3:40

Now, these changes are going to clearly help with things like the backlog of cases that have resulted as a result of the pandemic that we've all been experiencing. They're going to keep that backlog from growing in the future. They're going to ensure access to justice while maintaining the safety of Albertans as a top priority, and it's a top priority for this government.

Alberta's courts have made numerous changes in the response to COVID-19, including beginning to introduce teleconference and video conferencing, enabling remote filings, and altogether making it easier for Albertans to access the justice system. Those changes were made by necessity but are truly transformational and ultimately just plain old Alberta common sense.

These amendments would only continue to increase this efficiency. For those Albertans who live a large distance from their nearest courthouse or really just don't have the time to take away from their homes and families in order to attend court, we are giving them more options. This is the case for many of my constituents, for all those people that live in rural areas. Madam Speaker, for rural Albertans, this could potentially save them hours. In the winter months it could also mean hours not spent on icy roads, so we can tack on safety there. For parents, it could mean time that they don't have to pay for child care, and for the elderly or those who don't have access to transportation, it means that they have options for equitable and fair access to our justice system.

The amendments in this act are in so many ways very practical applications that will allow Albertans to be able to participate within our justice system, where perhaps before, because they have distance, because of weather, because of family conditions or situations, they would not have been able to. The amendments in this piece of legislation are good amendments. Madam Speaker, these amendments may be simple actions, but they – and they are not a complete overhaul of our justice system, by any stretch of the imagination. They are simply bringing our justice system into this

century. As you know, both in this century and in this government, we are just getting started.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 38. I have a number of things to ask on this bill, so I'll try to get to them all, but we'll see. I'd like to start out by saying something positive. Whenever it's possible to do this, I like to begin in this manner. I think it's – yeah; it's good to start with the positive. The recognition of First Nations police services is overdue, and it's incredibly important, so I congratulate the minister on that. I'm incredibly glad to see it. This is a very important step forward. It will enable them to designate their own members. It will enable them to do a number of other things. In my conversations with the three chiefs for these services, this is one of their number one asks. I think that's incredibly important.

That being said, I think I'd like to ask a question about that because another concern is about the rate at which First Nation police officers are funded. Most of the RCMP officers in this province are funded 70 per cent provincially – sorry. These are the ones that were paid for by the province prior to the changes the government brought in. They're paid 70 per cent provincially, or were before that cost was downloaded onto municipalities, and 30 per cent federally.

Communities are able to apply for additional officers, particularly First Nation communities, through the First Nation policing program. In addition, that program does encompass the First Nation services, so those officers are paid at a 48-52 split, but they're paid at a lower rate. The rate – like, the 70-30 split that occurred between the federal and provincial governments is on a larger number than the number which is provided for First Nation services. This creates a number of difficulties because they're trying to run those services based on a lower per capita or lower per officer funding, which is obviously a concern. It makes it difficult to attract and retain individuals to work in those services, so that can be problematic.

My question to the minister is whether that is being addressed in this. I know that it isn't just the provincial government that has a piece of this. I sat in that chair for four years and experienced the same thing over and over again when it came to renewing these First Nation policing agreements, where nations and services would come forward and say "We need to renegotiate this deal" and the province would come forward and say "We need to renegotiate this deal," and there would be radio silence from the federal government for 11 and a half months until they dropped a tripartite agreement on you two weeks before it was due and said, "Sign it, or you don't get any money." That was always frustrating, but I'm hoping that going forward, that can be addressed. I hope this isn't the last we hear on this issue.

I also hope it's not the last we hear on the Police Act. This was definitely a pressing concern in the Police Act. I'm really glad to see the minister address it. There are a number of other major concerns with the Police Act. The Police Act is old. It cannot be reamended piecemeal. It needs to be rewritten. I think that recent demonstrations have shown that in a number of different ways we need to think about.

When we launched our consultation in 2018, we launched with over 280 participants, multiple tables, different sorts of discussion groups, and that was done because what we really wanted to do was start from the ground up and say: "What are we trying to do here? What is it we're trying to achieve with the police service, and how

is it best achieved?" In my experience, police services were very open to that conversation because they're the ones standing on the ground. They're the ones on the front line who know where the rubber hits the road, and they understand that a lot of the ways that things are operating now don't do the best job of increasing community safety.

I hope that we will hear further amendments to this act. I hope that we will see a complete rewrite from the ground up. There are huge issues, one of the foremost of which is the ability of the public complaints, the ability of services to discipline officers. That's not to say that the officers are somehow privileged by this because, in fact, this system is problematic for everyone. If a citizen has made a complaint and an officer is awaiting the outcome of that complaint, everybody is waiting. The service is waiting, the officer is waiting, the citizen is waiting, and they're waiting for a long time. That puts everybody's life on hold. That's incredibly stressful for everyone involved, so it is an urgent issue. It does need to be fixed. It looks like the government is back on the time frame we were originally on with respect to rewriting this act, so I look forward with interest to seeing those amendments.

Other things that are in this act – it covers a lot of things. One of them is Queen's Counsel, and I think my concern there is that while it addresses some things, it doesn't address one of the major issues, one of the major concerns that I always had with the Queen's Counsel appointment process, and that is that it is not reflective of the people of this province. It does not reflect the fact that women and men graduate from law school at 50-50 rates and have been doing so for over a decade. The people who are eligible for Queen's Counsel now – when they graduated from law school, 50 per cent of the lawyers were women, yet of the applicants you see coming forward, those who are designated as Queen's Counsel are overwhelmingly men. I think that's highly problematic. More problematic still is the lack of representation by people of colour in that Queen's Counsel designation. It's a huge concern. It continues to be the case that these designations primarily fall to white men.

3:50

Now, I'm not saying that those people aren't deserving, but what I am saying is: do we really believe that the outcome of a merit-based system is that white men are overwhelmingly more meritorious than women or people of colour? I don't think that's the case. So I think that when we call it a merit-based system, we're wrong about that. I think that we're failing to recognize a number of critical and important factors that are feeding into this whole system. This problem exists, I will say, not just in Queen's Counsel. It exists in appointing judges, too. I had the honour of appointing the first indigenous woman to the court. I had the honour of appointing the first openly LGBTQ2S-plus member to the court. Two-thirds of my appointments were women. But it is still the case that the provincial court in this province is overwhelmingly male, overwhelmingly white. This is a problem that exists throughout the profession, but I think my concern here is not what's in it but what isn't in it, which is to say: any attempt to address that.

The other portion I'd like to talk about is the civil forfeiture act. I'd like to begin by saying that I'm glad to see that it's been renamed. It was always about civil forfeiture, and calling it the victims restitution act was very confusing because it got confused, obviously, with the Victims of Crime Act, with which you are very familiar, Madam Speaker. That did cause confusion for some people out there, so I'm glad to see this go ahead.

I'm a little concerned about the changes in here, but mostly I have questions about them. The reason I raise it is that this is a very delicate area. It's pretty complicated. I think the first thing that we should note is that civil forfeiture is extremely effective. It is particularly effective

in certain forms of economic crimes, forms of crime that are both underreported, underprosecuted, and underconvicted. I know I feel quite passionately about these things. I know not everyone does. You know, we still see victims of economic crime who don't come forward. We see huge underreporting in this area. We see that because people are embarrassed to admit what happened to them even though they're the victim. I think that's very problematic.

We also see it because these are resource-intensive investigations, which means I don't think they always get top priority in terms of investigating in our police service, and I think that's sad because I think that we should be demonstrating to the world that we take this seriously.

Some of the reasons why I think that civil forfeiture is important is because it is very effective on this particular type of crime that, honestly, runs unchecked, and we don't have a good grasp on exactly how bad the problem is. We just know it's worse than we even know it is. That being said, it needs to be taken with a very light touch when we're talking about civil forfeiture. This act significantly sort of broadens what is caught in terms of being under the civil forfeiture act. That could be good and that could be bad depending on how it's used, so I'm hoping that the minister can sort of provide a little bit more rationale as to why that was necessary. What is the problem that is attempting to be solved here? Were there specific instances in which people thought civil forfeiture ought to have been available and it was not? I think that would be very, very helpful.

Interestingly, it appears to remove the restitution assistance program. I think that's very problematic. Restitution is important. This is a victim's ability to seek, by way of the criminal process, so without having to sue separately over and above, restitution for damage they have suffered. They may have been a victim of a property crime, in which case they're essentially seeking to replace property or repair property or do any number of things. That is my reading of the act. If that's not true, I'm interested to know. But I think that's a concern if we're not going to move forward with that restitution assistance program because it's a complicated process, and people who have been wronged, who have been the victim of property crime, ought to have the ability to seek that restitution.

I think another change here is that the money being seized through civil forfeiture can now be used to fund the police. Now, I'm not saying that, off the cuff, I'm coming down one way or the other on this, but there have historically been a lot of concerns, particularly from civil rights lawyers, about the impact of this because civil forfeiture is expropriating someone of their property. Now, it may be because the property is the proceeds of crime, or it may simply be because the property was used in the commission of a crime. You can argue that both ways, but I think we need to take a light touch when we're talking about relieving someone of their property.

The concern that's been brought forward by a lot of sort of civil rights, civil society advocates is that if the police's funding is dependent on how much they forfeit from other people, there is a certain incentive in the system for the police to forfeit more, and I think that's why jurisdictions don't generally go this way in terms of allowing police to be funded through civil forfeiture. So I'd like to hear from the minister sort of what the safeguards are to prevent that from happening. Again, I don't know enough about how this is going to operate to say for sure that it's one way or the other, but I do definitely know that a lot of concerns are raised about that sort of thing and that it's something that's worth considering. Again, when you're taking away someone's property, as effective a tool as that may be, we really need to, I think, all know about the safeguards that are going on around that to ensure that it isn't a tool that's overused.

That's a lot of different changes that are going on in this act. I'm hopeful that we'll see the minister rise and talk about that. I think the civil forfeiture issue is definitely an interesting one. Again, like I've said, it is a very effective means of pursuing an interest. I'm a little surprised that the members opposite, who are generally very big proponents of property rights and increasing property rights, are bringing it forward. I would like to hear how those safeguards are going to be put in place because I do know that those concerns exist out there.

I also think that if the victims assistance restitution program is disappearing, that's a big concern. I suspect I will have more to say on this at a later time.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any members. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I thoroughly enjoyed her remarks on this important piece of legislation. This legislation amends six different pieces of legislation, which include the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the Jury Act, the Queen's Counsel Act, and the Referendum Act. I don't think that she got to talk to some of those, and I would like to hear what she has to say on the remaining pieces of this bill pertaining to other pieces of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: I suspected that might be the case.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, and thank you to my colleague for the opportunity. I had touched on a number of different changes that had been made here. I think another worthwhile one to touch on has to do with – part of this appears to be implementing a piece that was in another bill. What it is allowing to happen or what my reading of it – this is the amendment to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. My understanding is that what's happening here is that in certain instances of sort of traffic violations the officer will not be made available for cross-examination. That's a choice. It will certainly allow the wheels of justice to turn more quickly. I think there are arguments on both sides of the issue, and I have been presented with them. But what I would like to know from the minister is sort of what consultation was done on this. There are a number of folks who are working in this area who do very, very good work.

4:00

I certainly know that when something similar was considered while we were in government, the Canadian Bar Association came forward and presented a very lengthy paper on why they felt it was problematic not to have the officer available for cross-examination in those instances. Now, I mean, it's complicated. I'm a big fan of what they call administrative law, which is various tribunals outside of courts that determine things. If you appeal those things to a court, they often review them on sort of a standard that the interest you have in the proceeding kind of governs the level of procedural fairness to which you're entitled. I think that that's right.

I think the challenge with traffic matters, when you're talking about them, is that potentially the interest is very high. In some instances you got a ticket; you have to pay the ticket. Your interest in the matter is not that high. I understand why the procedural safeguards might be less than they are in, say, a criminal trial, where you risk going to jail. But in other instances, you know, if the person is sort of at the maximum number of demerits, potentially you're taking away their ability to drive for a significant period of time, which for some people is a pretty big concern.

So, yeah, I think I would just like to know sort of what consultation was undertaken there and maybe hear a little bit more from the minister about the decisions and the process in reaching those decisions because I think that can be a fairly major issue for some folks. I think that a lot of very smart people who are very familiar with this process have done a lot of work around that. I would like to know, you know, whether the minister spoke to the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association or the criminal defence lawyers association, whether he spoke to the Canadian Bar Association, who had a working group that put forward a paper on this, whether he consulted with the justices of the peace who do this work. There are also a number of sort of traffic ticket folks that work in this area as well.

With respect to consultation, actually, yeah, I would like to hear a little bit more about the consultation that went on with respect to First Nations in terms of the changes for First Nations policing. I think, again, that they're positive, so I suspect that folks were supportive, but I think it's worth hearing about that.

The other act, of course, that is in here is the amendments to the Referendum Act. I think my questions in here are mostly around costs, right? Whenever you do anything, it's a cost-benefit analysis. I don't think there's a problem on its face with . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. At this point I would like to move that we adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

[Adjourned debate October 28: Mr. Jason Nixon]

The Deputy Speaker: Are any members wishing to join debate on Bill 40? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Sorry; my mask just got a little bit tangled in my glasses there. Always a pleasure to rise in this place and speak to Bill 40, even in these unusual circumstances. I'd like to think that this act is something that is going to be really interesting because of course we support modernizing the act and taking action to create jobs in this legislation.

But I think that there's also, certainly, a lot to consider when we look at this process because despite its title of growing the forestry sector, Bill 40, Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020, the ministry has been unable up to this point, Madam Speaker, to present any information or economic analysis as asked for by my colleagues in this place. They've been unable to show any information on cost reductions to the sector because of the legislation. They've been unable to show any information on how much they estimate the industry would even grow, so I think I have some considerable concerns around the homework that this government did prior to introducing this bill.

Madam Speaker, I have some significant concerns around who they did not consult with because we know now that the ministry basically failed to consult with any First Nations. We know that because the government has been asked repeatedly in this place to tell us who they consulted with outside of industry, and they've completely failed to present any evidence to the contrary. It is something that simply is very disappointing because while these sort of routine modernizations of legislation, these sort of updates

to legislation are things that I think should be commended, I think is something that we should be doing more often – I think quite often we find legislation out of date by decades and that has not been changed in many, many years and no longer reflects the needs of industry.

Instead of actually going out and doing the work to ensure that the legislation would be successful and would actually provide these growth opportunities for the sector, the government basically just rushed this bill through without the consultation, without the work, and without even clarifying how they intend to enhance, in the minister's own words, the timber supply. Really, it seems like it's quite a lacklustre bill, a lacklustre piece of legislation.

The ministry's office in the technical briefing told us that in terms of the changes, in terms of the internal consultation with the industry, these were even parts of the industry that said – and I believe it's up to 10 per cent of the industry that said that the changes to this legislation are so small in nature, they're so negligible in benefit to the industry that it was better left untouched, that you might as well not even open the forestry act. Madam Speaker, when the industry is even saying, "Well, you know, government opened the act but then didn't really do anything with it," that's how you know it's pretty disappointing.

When the intent has been to modernize this legislation and when the intent has been to grow Alberta's forest sector to, in the minister's words, enhance the timber supply, and to have these growth opportunities, instead of seeing any of that accomplished, we see members of the industry actually saying, basically, that this was a waste of time. We see members of the industry saying that it's not worth bringing this forward.

Madam Speaker, I think that in the middle of a jobs crisis, in the middle of perhaps the largest economic recession we've ever seen here in the province, in the middle of the government already, before the pandemic, losing 50,000 jobs and then now additionally losing more during the pandemic, in the middle of this \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway to already wealthy and profitable corporations, instead of actually introducing legislation, which they had the opportunity here to do if they'd done the proper consultations, if they had gone out and actually done the homework, instead of actually doing any of those things, we now see this lacklustre piece of legislation that, while being generally favourable in terms of updating terminology and updating some regulations and technicalities, unfortunately will not do any of the purported things the government intends to do, will not actually result in any of this industry growth the government intends, will not actually indeed grow and create new jobs, as the government has said. As the industry has said itself, it's largely negligible and largely inconsequential changes.

Madam Speaker, the ministry has failed indeed to answer many of the questions that this opposition has continued to ask in this place around this legislation. For example, they have been unable to provide an update on the ongoing softwood lumber dispute. They've been unable to provide an update on what the minister's team has been doing in Washington to protect the sector. They've been unable to present an update to show how this legislation would be reflected in those negotiations and how that would work.

Madam Speaker, it simply is disappointing that it seems like this government, instead of actually going out and creating jobs, instead of actually trying to deal with the over 50,000 jobs that they lost before the pandemic even began, instead of actually trying to find jobs for Albertans after their \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway didn't work, instead of trying to do any of those things, the government has rushed in this lacklustre piece of legislation without any consultation with First Nations, without any real consultation in terms of developing a framework that would actually allow the

industry to grow. Instead, it has made minor technical changes. Instead, it has made minor technical changes around things like changing forest licences to timber quotas, made minor technical changes in terms of changing the years, the length of time to extend from five to 10 years for harvest for a timber quota.

4:10

Really, Madam Speaker, it's really disappointing that there was this opportunity to do all of this and actually increase the revenues and increase the industry and increase the growth in the industry and create new jobs in the industry, and instead of seeing any of that work actually done, we see time and time again a pattern of behaviour from this government. We see a pattern of behaviour that the values of this government seem to be that they don't want to do the homework. They don't want to actually consult. They don't want to actually build the bills. They don't want to actually go out and do the work required to have legislation that has meaningful impact for the people of Alberta. They seem to not want to do the work that would actually create any new jobs. They don't want to do any work that would actually offset any of the disastrous economic policy they've already implemented here in this place.

Again, Madam Speaker, even before this pandemic began – even before this pandemic began – this government lost 50,000 jobs here in the province of Alberta, and the forestry industry, according to the government of Alberta, directly employs about 18,700 Albertans, so in excess of all the people that are being affected by this legislation, this government already saw their jobs being lost under their rule. That's what's so profoundly disappointing because they had the opportunity to try and offset those losses. They had the opportunity to try and build legislation that would actually grow the industry.

Of course, the minister seems to want to do that. The minister says in his remarks time and time again how he's looking at growing the industry and time and time again how he's looking at enhancing the timber supply, time and time again how this is supposed to be for growing Alberta's forest sector, Madam Speaker, but instead of doing any of the work that would have actually resulted in that, we see this government giving \$4.7 billion away to already wealthy, already profitable corporations, and it's simply so disappointing. It's simply so disappointing because Alberta families, Alberta workers really depend on legislation that comes through here to help them out, to try and create more jobs. They had the opportunity to do that. They had the opportunity to actually bring legislation. They consulted with industry, I mean, and the industry themselves, a significant amount of industry themselves said: well, you know, it's not going to do anything.

So when the government's own consultation says that this legislation is not going to do anything, that's how you know that the government has messed up. That's how you know that it's a lacklustre piece of legislation. That's how you know that it really is not living up to its name, and I think that's something that's pretty disappointing. This minister should perhaps go back to the drawing board. I think this minister should perhaps do more of his homework, and perhaps this minister should come back with something after perhaps consulting with, indeed, more of the industry and continue consulting with the industry to figure out where the concerns were – these were larger technical changes – and instead bring in substantive changes that would have allowed the industry to see more growth.

Perhaps the minister could go back and actually consult with First Nations so that we wouldn't see potential legal difficulties there. The minister could go back and actually do any of the things that are basically included in a minister's job description, Madam Speaker. I think the minister should take the opportunity and admit that this is something that isn't going to do the things in the title,

that isn't going to do the things that he mentioned in his remarks here earlier in this place. When we look at this, the minister is unable to provide any analysis, again, that it would create a single new job, right? When we actually asked the minister in the technical briefing, we said: how many new jobs will this create? The title is: growing Alberta's forest sector act. How many new jobs will it create? What type of economic analysis has been done? How much would investment increase in Alberta? Simple numbers, when you title a bill growing the Alberta forestry sector act, that should be easy to produce. I know that the government gets these. It should be in the top line, key messages for them. Like, we created this many new jobs. We attract this much more investment.

Madam Speaker, the minister is unable to produce a single one of those numbers. The minister is unable to even say: well, we think five new jobs are created or 10 or 100. But it turns out that the government just hasn't done any of the research. Instead of doing the research, the government is depending on a plan that lost 50,000 jobs before the pandemic began, and then it's accelerating their \$4.7 billion giveaway to already wealthy and already profitable corporations. They're bringing in this lacklustre legislation and saying: well, it's going to create some jobs; we just didn't bother to check how many.

Madam Speaker, I think that if the minister was in grade school here, that would be a failing grade. You can't just present a piece of legislation like this and tell us that it's going to do all these amazing things and then not present a real path for it, not present a real plan, not present an actual design for how this is supposed to work. It's something that's so disappointing because we want so badly for this government to succeed, right? We so badly want this government to regain some of those 50,000 jobs they lost before the pandemic, before their \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway to wealthy and profitable corporations, to actually create a single new job. But the reality is that not a single new job is being made. Indeed, jobs are actually being lost. Every single day more and more Albertans are losing their jobs, and every single day the cost of living is going up for Albertans. We see that over and over and over again.

So when the government comes forward, and they have these lofty pieces of legislation – titles of legislation, anyways, Madam Speaker; they have these lofty titles of legislation. When the government comes forward and says, "We're going to do all these amazing things," it would be great if they actually did. It would be great if they actually went and did the homework. It would be great if they actually went and did the prep work and did create these new jobs and actually did create investments in Alberta and actually did create new growth opportunities here in Alberta. Indeed, none of those things seem to be happening.

[Ms Glasgo in the chair]

It seems like the government simply said: we're going to make some technical tweaks, we're going to try and pull a quick one over Albertans, and suddenly we're going to tell them that we grew the sector. The reality is, Madam Speaker, that the industry itself said that that isn't true. The industry knows that the government is trying to pull the wool over the eyes here. It simply looks like the government has failed to do the work required. The government has failed to actually consider how they can improve the lives of Albertans.

Time and time again the government gives \$4.7 billion in corporate giveaways to already wealthy foreign shareholders, the government loses 50,000 jobs before the pandemic even begins, and then they say: oh, we're going to solve the jobs crisis with this really lofty title in the legislation. What does it actually do? Well, not really anything that the industry thinks is substantive, but it's good

to create all these new jobs. That's basically the argument the government is presenting today. That's basically the argument because the government, of course, released their own consultation, and that's the result of their consultation, right? It's basically the argument the government is presenting.

It's so disappointing because the opportunity for the government to have actually created a plan that would have worked to grow the sector, the opportunity for the government to actually create a plan that would have consulted with First Nations people, the opportunity for the government to actually create a plan that would have modernized the act along with taking real action to create jobs was so great. The minister had months to do this, right? The minister had basically the whole year to do this. He could have gone out and actually planned and talked to the industry on how the industry should grow. But instead of doing any of that, it's sort of just been seen to be minor technical changes.

Madam Speaker, it looks like the minister hasn't considered many of the issues that are around the lumber industry and the timber industry. We know that because when we keep asking questions in this place, the minister has the opportunity, of course – every single time an opposition member speaks in this place, the minister has the opportunity to reply under 29(2)(a). Every single time the opposition asks the government around issues such as consultation, around issues such as the softwood lumber dispute, around issues such as even the caribou protection plan and conservation plan signed with the federal government and what balances have been found in regards to supporting the industry and also protecting species at risk, every single time the opposition asks these questions, the minister fails to respond. The minister basically doesn't answer the questions. Indeed, the government members are unable to answer these questions as well.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the facts laid out in front of us, when we look at the legislation we've got in front of us, and we look at the debate actually happening in this place, it's very clear that the government is failing to actually create any new jobs. The government is failing to create any new investment.

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

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the points made by the member opposite, but I'm just trying to follow his real concerns about this particular bill. This is a very important bill for the agricultural and forestry sectors. More than 60 per cent, which is roughly 87 million acres, is forested in Alberta, which is larger than the country of Japan or Germany. This sector supports almost 19,500 people and supports more than 35,000 additional jobs in Alberta, contributing \$1.7 billion in salaries, wages. And then this act was not updated since 1971.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

When the member opposite is talking about the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: he answers all the questions. He's a very knowledgeable guy. He's a farmer himself. He answered all the questions in this House.

4:20

I couldn't follow what the member opposite is trying to say when he's saying \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway. I hear that from every member of the NDP in this House. Today, through you, Madam Speaker, I'm going to ask the member opposite to actually give me the list of recipients of that \$4.7 billion giveaway. I would rather encourage him to go and take videos – he's very good at it. I encourage him to go and take videos of those corporations or

companies that he's talking about who receive \$4.7 billion. This is not child's play; \$4.7 billion is very big money.

Mr. Dang: How many dollars?

Mr. Panda: It's \$4.7 billion. B for billion, not million.

Mr. Dang: How many? Four point seven what?

Mr. Panda: Billion. When you keep saying – yeah. If you stack it up, right, so you can measure it, you can imagine that probably you can get . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, just direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Panda: Sure.

I mean, I want to put an end to this, you know, misinformation spread using this august House and this Assembly. We kept saying that there was no \$4.7 billion giveaway, but they keep repeating the same thing. I'm asking them. I'm pleading with them: please provide me with the proof. People in Calgary-Edgemont would appreciate it if I can go and tell them: yes, the member opposite from Edmonton-South, when he's saying \$4.7 billion, it is real; it is not a myth.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: He should do some more homework.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Exactly.

He was part of the government. They were in government for four years. That's why under 29(2)(a) through you, Madam Speaker, I would ask that they withdraw and apologize if they can't provide me the proof of the \$4.7 billion that was given away allegedly by the government, which I'm a member of the Executive Council. I couldn't find that. I went around in Calgary even during, you know, Halloween. I asked kids to go and find it, actually. Where is that \$4.7 billion? Nobody in Calgary could find it.

Mr. Sabir: Because they took the money and left.

Mr. Panda: But if they took it and left the country, like the companies Shell, Chevron, Total – I can name every letter of the alphabet during the NDP's four years. Every company ran away because these guys drove them away with their taxes, with their regulations, with their red tape.

Now, I mean, we're trying to bring it back on track, and he knows that there is a pandemic. We're trying to create those jobs. He says that we didn't create any. I gave the list of the jobs we created through infrastructure spending in Infrastructure, Transportation, 50,000 jobs. I actually gave the proof. I said that I was in this town. This is the project we announced. These are the number of jobs it will create.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 40 in second reading? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am truly honoured to rise in this House today and speak to Bill 40, the Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020. Being from Livingstone-Macleod, part of the riding where I live, it would be odd maybe to think of me speaking on forestry because every tree in my area of the riding is intentionally planted and curated. They're very rare in the half of the riding where I live, but not too far from us in the west, forestry plays an important role in our economy. In fact, I have had several discussions with my friend and colleague

the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, whose great-grandfather ran a sawmill in Porcupine Hills not too far west of where I was raised.

We know that forestry is an important industry not just in Livingstone-Macleod but in all of Alberta. Forestry has provided hundreds of great-paying jobs in Livingstone-Macleod, and it is done with the strongest environmentally sustainable practises in the world. This industry is vital for Alberta's economy. It has provided the materials that we need to build our communities and to continuously improve our quality of life as Albertans, but the existing legislation has not been updated for decades.

Times have changed. I saw that first-hand. One of my first tours after being elected as MLA for Livingstone-Macleod was to tour some of the sites of Spray Lake Sawmills, where they have been working in the Porcupine Hills and on the eastern slopes. I've seen first-hand how the times and technologies have changed, and we now have a better understanding of our regulatory system and what needs to be done to it to make the industry competitive while ensuring that we continue with our strong sustainable practices.

Extensive consultations with stakeholders between February and August this year have helped guide the amendments that have been proposed. In the last election we committed to the forest jobs guarantee and to reduce red tape in this sector. The consultations, the reviews, and the amendments reflect these commitments.

The forest industry and our government are committed to sustainable forest management and securing a timber supply, which is demonstrated by the added preamble to the Forests Act. Amendments within this legislation will reduce the rigidity within the regulatory system and will assist industry in responding to environmental and regulatory issues. I'm happy to see the amendments put forward by the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and how they will impact the sustainable management of our forests, which is more important now than ever. Sustainable management of our forests is important to me, and it's important to the people of my constituency. We must balance the needs of industry with the needs of the environment and our communities. We must ensure that our forests can be utilized properly so that we can continue to prosper from them for generations to come. I believe that we are a model for sustainable development and management for the entire world here in Alberta.

I believe that Bill 40 increases our commitment to sustainable development and allows industry to deal with variables outside of its control. Forest fires and mountain pine beetle damage are an ever-present danger and challenge to the industry and to the environment within Livingstone-Macleod. The forest industry plays an integral role in managing these challenges and is often on the front lines when these issues occur. That is why it's important to extend the maximum harvest control period to 10 years. The maximum time for a harvest control period is currently five years, and that short time frame reduces a company's ability to respond to the effects of both forest fires and mountain pine beetle infestations. With the option of a 10-year harvest control period companies will have the flexibility to deal with and to adapt to these environmental issues.

Bill 40 will allow the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry to regularly update timber dues based upon current market and industry conditions by publishing new rates regularly. This change will add an additional layer of transparency for industry and allow the government to strengthen its trade position when needed. These new measures will allow us to adapt to issues such as the softwood lumber dispute and will provide more certainty to the industry. Our government must have the necessary tools available to confront and adapt to international disputes, and Bill 40 does just that.

We now see that timber licences have become redundant within a modern forest management plan as most timber quota holders are currently required to undertake planning, anyways. By eliminating these licences, only one approval decision is required instead of two, which reduces red tape and provides more efficient regulatory process for our forestry industry.

Madam Speaker, I'm glad to stand and support Bill 40 today. It is a necessary bill that will bring the regulatory processes of our forestry industry out of the past and into the 21st century. It reduces red tape and inefficiencies while continuing to demonstrate our strong commitment to sustainable management. I urge all members in the House today to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in second reading of Bill 40, the Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020. I'd like to take a moment if I may, Madam Speaker, to respond to some questions that were posed by the hon. Minister of Infrastructure pursuant in this debate on second reading of Bill 40. He raised a number of questions with respect to: where does the \$4.7 billion come from for the corporate income tax cut?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I might suggest that would best be used under a 29(2)(a) instead of in the debate around this topic. I realize 29(2)(a) provides a large swath of topic of material but sometimes tends to send our debate off course. I'll just express some caution in your debate as you move forward.

4:30

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, then let me say, in talking about Bill 40, the Forest (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020, that growing our economy is indeed very important, and it's one of the things that is top of mind for all Albertans right now and particularly the members of the Official Opposition. For that reason, we need to take a critical lens and look very closely at any measures that are brought forward with the objective of growing our economy because that is what's driving most of the work we should be doing right now. It should be the top priority for the government when they're bringing forward legislation. It should be the top priority when deciding about how to spend our limited resources in this province and where to invest it.

When I look at Bill 40, we have to look at it in the lens of: what is part of the bigger economic strategy of this government, and are they bringing forward measures that are actually going to contribute to economic growth? For example, Madam Speaker, when we look at what's provided right here in Bill 40, we have to look at it in the context of the government's decision to make dramatic cuts to the corporate income tax rate because that, of course, was driven, apparently, by the impetus of trying to grow the economy, but what we see is that it has actually only resulted in a giveaway of \$4.7 billion.

For those members, including the Minister of Infrastructure and anybody else who's interested in knowing where those dollars came from, as he asked, well, that actually came from, as you know, Madam Speaker, page 144 of this government's 2020-2023 fiscal plan. Now, I would offer – when you're in debate and you reference a document, you should table that document, of course, but I would assume that all members of the cabinet, including, of course, all

government members, have seen that document already since it is their document. It is set out in their fiscal plan. In fact, I have to say that as members of the Official Opposition we've actually done our own calculations about how much that would be, and what we found was actually that it would be closer to \$4.5 billion. But then the government so kindly issued their documents based on their economic analysis, based on their calculations, which made it clear that it was actually \$4.7 billion. If the Minister of Infrastructure is curious as to where that figure came from, it came from this government's own documents.

Now, if he's also curious – because I think we all have to be very careful when we're looking at Bill 40 and we're looking at ways to grow the forestry sector in our economy and we have to look at effective managements. We want to know: well, what are the measures available to us to actually invest, say, in growing certain economies? Of course, that requires government resources, but when we know, for example, that a significant amount of revenue and resources available to this government have been given away in a corporate income tax cut, that limits our ability to actually invest in certain sectors that we want to grow such as the forestry industry.

For example, when we see that Husky posted that they actually saw a \$233 million benefit from the corporate income tax cut, but it didn't actually result in any further investments or increased jobs, that would be \$233 million that we can no longer use to grow our forestry economy and our forestry sector because it's been given away by this government. Similarly, Madam Speaker, EnCana received \$55 million in benefits as a result of the corporate tax cut from this, and that also hinders our ability to grow our forestry economy, as, apparently, is the objective of this legislation. Even more shocking is that according to Suncor's second-quarter report, quote, their net earnings in the prior year quarter included a one-time deferred income tax recovery of \$1.116 billion associated with the staged reduction to the Alberta corporate income tax rate.

If we're curious, Madam Speaker, about our ability to do the things that Bill 40 is apparently targeted at doing, which is growing our forestry economy, we have to look at it in light of other decisions the government has made to hinder our ability to invest and support other growing economies in this province. Therefore, it is very relevant, I believe, to look at the decisions that this government has made to give away significant amounts of our revenue that now has affected our ability to invest in sectors like the forestry industry.

I just wanted to give that context, Madam Speaker, because I do believe it's important that when we're looking at legislation that's brought forward at a time when we are at an economic crisis in this province, every piece of legislation that's brought forward should be brought forward with improving our economic situation, should be brought forward for economic recovery, and should reflect that the government is taking all the steps necessary to make sure we can most effectively recover from the economic recession that we're facing right now.

That's why, Madam Speaker, I have to say that Bill 40 is a bit of a disappointment, and it's actually following a bit of a theme that we're seeing from this government in this session so far, which is that making small, tinkering changes to legislation is being heralded as somehow making a significant difference in those sectors or in economic recovery. I listened with great interest to the government members who talked about how important our forestry industry is – it absolutely is – and that it has been some time since the Forests Act has been brought forward for amendment. That's also true. However, what I don't see in this act is anything that's actually dramatic, that actually reflects a new vision, that's actually targeted

at growing the forestry industry, which is apparently what this bill is supposed to do.

Now, Madam Speaker, there are certain pieces of it that I think are certainly nice to have. There are certainly some changes to the preamble that I think are great statements, but what we need to see is: what is the plan? What is the plan and policy of this government to actually do what it says it's doing here, which is investing in the forestry economy?

For example, there are some statements in here in the preamble that are, I think, valuable. In particular I note that the preamble statement – here it is – adds a clause that I think is very important. On page 2 of Bill 40 it mentions, for example, a preamble statement that says:

Whereas the government of Alberta recognizes the threat from a changing climate to Alberta's forests, including the increased risk of wildfires and pests, and the potential of forests to mitigate climate impacts.

I think that's a very important, valid, and appropriate statement because it recognizes the impacts of climate change on – well, I mean, we know that climate change affects much of our air, water, ground, much of our resources, and our environment, but this is in the context of the forestry act.

Certainly, anybody who has lived in this province for as long as many of us, I know, have has seen the rise in wildfires throughout this province. It's something that, unfortunately, has become a bit of a common occurrence in the past few years and summers. I can say that growing up in Edmonton, I certainly was not close to many highly forested areas, certainly not ones that were used specifically for the forestry industry, yet having grown up in this province and been here for 40 years, I can say that I don't remember it being a regular occurrence that in Edmonton, for example, we would be experiencing poor air quality, smoke in the air because of wildfires that were happening. But certainly that has become the norm over the last few years.

In fact, I've had a number of – my children have asked if this is what happens every summer, and I said I can tell them that it's not something that happened every summer when I was growing up, but it is certainly something that is quite a regular occurrence right now in Alberta, wildfires, and, of course, that we know is partly a result of climate change.

I'm heartened to see that the government has chosen to include in Bill 40 a recognition of the impact of climate change on Alberta's forests. However, I have to say, you know, that while this is great to see in Bill 40, I certainly have to question whether or not all the government members currently actually acknowledge even the mere existence of climate change. I wonder, for example – the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright just last week, Madam Speaker, got up in this House and made a statement whereby he supported denial of climate change, which is shocking from anybody who is in government right now, to deny the importance of climate change, yet he did that.

Not only, of course, is that in, I guess, opposition to what is currently in this bill right now and in the preamble, which does recognize the impact of climate change on Alberta's forests; it also seems to fly in the face of any efforts by this government to actually position Alberta as a place where investors will want to come. We know that if we're continuing to deny climate change, if government members are denying climate change, it's certainly going to fly in the face of showing that we are a progressive, responsive, exciting, and innovative place to invest because we know that the global markets are talking about the need to recognize climate change and the need to take those efforts to address it. Certainly, I'm glad to see this recognized in Bill 40. I certainly hope the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright takes the

time to read this, and perhaps the minister of agriculture can actually have a word with him about why climate change is a real thing. Certainly, I'm concerned that all the government members are not on side with that, and perhaps he will speak against that.

4:40

I also want to comment a little bit, Madam Speaker, on my understanding of what the Forests Act is supposed to do. Again, I am the representative from Edmonton-Whitemud, which is not a riding that has a lot of forestry. That certainly is not something that most of the constituents in my riding experience, the forest industry, on a daily basis although I'm certain there are constituents who have family and they themselves might actually work in support of the forestry industry in many ways, including, by the way, individuals who probably work for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

I can say that my understanding of the act and what it does is that, you know, it sets out sort of the forestry industry's equivalency of royalties, which we're familiar with, of course, from the oil and gas sector, and the collection of timber dues and Crown charges and other fees associated with those timber dispositions. It's set out under the authority of the Forests Act as well as the timber management regulation as to how those dues and fees are collected. It also sets out, of course, sort of the heart of the system, which is the forest management agreements, which is this long-term, 20-year, renewable, area-based form of forest tenure. It is a secure-tenure type in Alberta.

Through that system, the forest management agreements, Madam Speaker, it gives certain rights to the owner, including the right to establish, grow, harvest, and remove Crown timber in exchange for various responsibilities such as forest management planning and creation and maintenance of the forest inventory within the boundaries of the forest management act. Of course, again, that's spoken to a little bit within the preamble, that there are certain objectives around the forest managements that are important around reforestation, sustainability. Again, these are all very important from an environmental perspective but also for the sustainability of the industry. These are very important principles, so I'm glad to see those principles recognized within the preamble although I have to again say that I'm not sure what those changes actually do to increase economic activity around forestry.

That's one of the things that, I understand, was asked of the minister. We continue to ask, and I hope that the minister will answer these questions around what actually in the act is going to contribute to that growing of Alberta's forest sector other than just saying that it's so. I think that's becoming a bit of a hallmark of this government; for example, on Bill 39 simply putting the words "early learning" in front of "child care" and suddenly it makes the act about early learning when there's nothing in the act that actually does that. I worry, Madam Speaker, that the same is being done here with Bill 40.

It's titled "Growing Alberta's Forest Sector," but it doesn't seem to make any substantive change, and we have not seen any evidence from the minister of agriculture to support that he actually has done an economic analysis, that he is going to show how this is growing Alberta's forestry sector, especially in light of the self-imposed limitations that this government has put on itself by choosing to give away \$4.7 billion to already profitable corporations who are not taking those dollars and actually investing them in Alberta, are not creating jobs. In fact, it seems to fly in the face of even the evidence that this government had even prior to the pandemic. They were actually driving away jobs. They've lost 50,000 jobs even before – oh. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is shaking his

head. He doesn't like that statement very much. Sorry, Madam Speaker. I'm just pointing that out in case you hadn't noticed that.

But it's true; 50,000 jobs is a big number, especially at a time when we're supposed to be growing our economy and especially from a government that campaigned on jobs, economy, and pipelines, yet we've seen none of those things. I am worried. At a time when this government should be focused in a very clear way and actually taking economic strategies that will help our economy recover, which will grow jobs, which will attract investment, instead we see them patting themselves on the back or bringing forward legislation that seems very nice – I mean, there's nothing particularly wrong with Bill 40. I think my fellow colleagues have raised questions about the degree of consultation with First Nations, which is a significant issue. There are a number of pieces of legislation that are brought forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's good to be back, and it's always interesting to hear a different perspective. I don't speak freaky-deaky socialist very well, so I'm going to have to go back to the *Hansard* and try to get the understanding here. Essentially, there's a lot of confusion around \$4.7 billion and some basic mathematics, so let me help the members opposite. The revisionist history has been wonderful today. I really appreciate that.

Let's take a little trip back in the wayback machine. Let's go back to a time where the actual government of the time was protesting pipelines, where at the time the Premier called up somebody by the name of Rob Merrifield down in the States, who was our lobbyist sitting there, and said: pencils down on Keystone XL.

When you have people saying how bad our industry is, how bad our environmental policies are, when they're jumping up and down and screaming climate extinction or rebellion extinction or whatever extinction thing they happen to be doing at the time, badmouthing the policies of the province, all the work that the folks do, calling us – I don't know – embarrassing cousins, sewer rats, all those types of things: you poisoned the well. You raised prices up so badly. You put up corporate tax so much. You made people drive away from you. You didn't listen to folks like Wyn Morgan. You didn't listen to a bunch of folks who were telling you all the issues you were doing. Then you started playing – I don't know – before you were going out the door, spending cash, like, hand over fist.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I just caution you to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Getson: Oh, I'm sorry. I was looking down at my book. I apologize, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, then they go out and they buy a bunch of train cars, spending money hand over fist – I don't know – throwing it to the wind, making promises that no one could ever keep. They left us a pile of mess. The only and last time I've ever seen that was Saddam Hussein pulling out of Kuwait, burning up oil wells when they were going out, kind of a scorched-earth policy. A hundred and eighty thousand people went out, six credit downgrades: this is when the times were good, arguably, compared to what we're doing right now. Unreal.

You talk about this quandary you have, this whole question of why a backbencher, a lowly backbencher, might disagree with somebody in our party. Because we're allowed to. It's called freedom. When I first got here, a person by the name of Robyn Luff gave me insight to how this party, the NDP Party, works. All I said was that I thought they were messed up, Madam Speaker, to start off with. Her thing was talking about bullying, not having any

voice, and eventually being run out of that party. I think everyone at home can appreciate that in this party we've got a voice. Lowly backbenchers can actually have their own opinions and offer input into it. It's a different way of running things. It's not the socialist way, but it's a free way of doing it.

I did work in the forestry industry. In fact, we had it. Back in the '80s we had a mixed farm. We also did logging. We also had a sawmill. I was one of those kids that grew up around sawdust and the smell of two-stroke oil, working. People augmented. In the wintertime we went out to the bush. I was running a 640 John Deere skidder. I was running a logging crew when I was 19 to be able to pay for my college myself. I know it's a strange concept for the members opposite, but a lot of people do go out and work in different industries. They take those jobs so they can work themselves forward.

What the minister is doing, trying to do to help reduce some of the rates on the stumpage fees, is going to help out a bunch of folks. My own thing is the way-back machine again. I wish we could look at some of the smaller loggers and operators and try to give them a little bit of access to wood products. I still have a sawmill to this day. It's one of those things, when you talk about culture and history, that's kind of in your blood. You go out and do that. I had a constituent that had some problems with trees out there. I went out and dropped the trees for him. And the benefit of doing that, for helping my neighbour, was that I got the logs, so I could saw them up and make some furniture. We actually understand what is happening over here. Forget the revisionist history of how they're trying to coin things and say this \$4.7 billion.

Now, let's put a real context here. You drive out a bunch of business because you raised the taxes too high so you have a lesser value to tax. What happens is that we lower the tax so that we can get higher volume. If you attack something – you know, the member opposite still doesn't get it, but that's okay. I'll try to explain it. I can only speak in low terms here. I'm not that smart. I'm just a farm kid. You tax a hundred bucks at 20 per cent, you get 20 bucks. You tax a thousand bucks at 10 per cent, well, how much do you get? A hundred bucks, right? Easy math. That's the concept. We're not giving away money. You can't give it away if you don't have it in the first place. You poisoned the well. You poisoned the animals. No one's going to come back to it. That's what's taking place. [interjection]

Madam Speaker, I love it when they heckle. I just love it because it gives me an insight on how bad things were. They're honestly trying to drag everybody down through fear. They're trying to get people all scared about what's happening out there rather than giving them hope. What we should be talking about in here are things that bond us and bring us together, not things that divide us. Give us credit where credit is due. Give us a kick in the pants when we need it, and give us a pat on the back when we deserve it. That's what Albertans want. They want this divisiveness to end. On October 17 last year I gave a speech. I asked for . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join debate on second reading of Bill 40? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to provide my support and voice my thoughts on Bill 40, the Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry for taking the initiative and important measures to ensure the protection of Alberta's forest sector.

4:50

Alberta's forest industry has been directly employing more than 19,500 people and supports more than 25,000 additional jobs in Alberta. Madam Speaker, forestry is an important sector and has

been part of Alberta's economy for many years, contributing more than \$2 billion to the provincial GDP. Alberta's land area is about 163.54 million acres, and roughly more than 87 million acres is forested. This is equivalent to big countries like Japan, Germany, meaning this is an important factor that supports many Albertans.

Madam Speaker, it is frustrating to know that the Forests Act was last substantially updated in 1971 and has not seen significant changes for almost 50 years. The Alberta government is trying harder than ever to modernize this act, and that would significantly contribute to the delivery of the forest jobs guarantee and red tape reduction. From the pioneers who farmed untouched soil to Alberta's indigenous stewards, we have developed a long, proud, and successful history of responsible and sustainable forestry practices that have benefited Albertans.

The forestry sector is the product of our old, renowned entrepreneurial spirit that sacrificed their time to ensure Albertans were supported over many years. More than 90 communities are supported by Alberta's forest sector. Alberta's forest industry directly employs 19,500 people and supports more than 25,000 additional jobs in Alberta. Before COVID-19 Alberta had one of the fastest growing lumber industries in North America. In 2019 it contributed \$2 billion to the provincial GDP and \$1.7 billion in salaries and wages while accounting for roughly 8 per cent of Alberta's manufacturing sector.

Madam Speaker, the growing Alberta's forest sector amendment act demonstrates the government's commitment to reduce the regulatory burden that slows government approvals. This demonstrates that Alberta is among the leading jurisdictions to conduct business and attract capital investment. However, the province now faces the largest job crisis since the Great Depression. With forestry policies in direct need of modernization, the Alberta government recognizes that job creators need policies that honour their resiliency and commitment to hard work.

With an economy contraction exceeding 11 per cent at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, these are challenging times indeed, but time and time again Albertans never caved in the face of adversity. We stood by each other, side by side, during times of unprecedented hardship. Albertans' strong work ethic and determined attitudes are conducive to the province's entrepreneurial spirit. The hard work passed down through the generations is a testament to the spirit of our families and a shared desire to further the common goal of all Albertans.

Under Bill 40, the Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020, the Alberta government is modernizing the act to contribute to the forest jobs guarantee and red tape reduction delivery. The Forests Act provides for and defines the power to establish regulations related to forestry and allows for approval of the right to harvest Crown timber on forest tenure. This legislative and regulatory framework enables the competitive conditions that attract and retain forestry industry investment in Alberta.

The act has not seen any significant changes for almost 50 years. It needs to be adjusted to reflect Alberta's forest industry's current realities. The Alberta government engaged in stakeholder consultation with 41 forestry companies in early 2020 on a series of proposed legislative changes. The Forests Act amendments and the forest jobs action plan support the government's platform commitment to jobs and a sustainable economy. It protects jobs and livelihoods for tens of thousands of Albertans, workers who work countless hours to grow one of our essential industries.

It is also part of Alberta's recovery plan, or ARP, designed to have stable access to trees and to provide support on product development. These pillars under the ARP can be realized as the government has firm determination to help grow Alberta's forest sector by stabilizing the fibre supply of industry through the elimination of needless constraints on the annual allowable cut.

Also, an important factor that seeks to establish on our way to prosperity in the pursuit of new trading partners is the exploration of the potential growth of Alberta's value-added sector to better support secondary wood product development.

The first jobs action plan approved by cabinet in April 2020 seeks to increase the annual allowable cut and ensure timber supply security for the forest industry. While increasing timber supply security is not the primary intent of the amendment to the Forests Act contained in Bill 40, some of the changes speak to the importance of timber supply security and support forestry product utilization, which supports jobs within the forest industry. Specifically, the proposed addition of a preamble within the Forests Act will directly acknowledge the importance of timber supply security to the industry and the provincial economy. Timber is a valued natural resource that serves directly as a material for use in construction, paper, manufacturing, specialty wood products such as furniture, and as a fuel source.

Bill 40 demonstrates the government's commitment to reduce the regulatory burden that slows government approvals. The removal of redundant licence requirements will reduce wait times for licence processing. Eliminating this duplicate licence could save the industry up to \$2,000 a year per licence, and it will reduce industry delays by approximately two weeks per licence.

Madam Speaker, Bill 40 will increase transparency around how dues are calculated by making the calculation methods available to the public and by providing regular updates to promote sector competitiveness, which will as well strengthen our province's trade position, mainly in the ongoing softwood lumber dispute.

Also, Bill 40 seeks to provide greater flexibility for the forest industry to respond to market and environmental conditions by allowing 10-year harvest control periods as another option to the existing five-year option for the timber quota holders. By modernizing the Forests Act, the provisions of this bill will pave the way for future regulatory changes that will significantly impact the way forest companies do business and enable the forest sector to be a critical economic driver in Alberta's recovery.

This bill will also eliminate the unnecessary red tape for forestry companies to hold a timber licence in addition to their timber quota by adjusting quotas to provide all of the necessary oversight by today's forest management planning standards. By streamlining the industry procedures, the Alberta government ensures reliable access to timber supply, provides security for capital investments, and maintains an attractive investment environment for generations to come.

I again applaud the minister for these needed changes to the Forests Act. I'm sure that the industry is glad to welcome these changes after long years of resilience on our dated provisions that were faced with unnecessary limitations. This will also pave the way for more growth and innovation in Alberta's forest sector while at the same time creating more jobs for hard-working Albertans.

So I encourage all the members of this Chamber to support Bill 40. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 40 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

5:00

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak for the first time on Bill 40, Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020. There are quite a number of things that I find interesting in this particular bill. On first blush,

you know, I might have taken the hon. member's advice, the previous speaker, to support the bill, but there are a number of questions that I would like to have answered. Second reading is a good time to perhaps clear the air in regard to specific issues, and then people can make a consideration and move forward from there.

I guess generally I wasn't aware of this until recently, but this seems to be the first opening of this act in many years, so my initial feeling about that is that if this is sort of the first opportunity to make modernization and changes to the act, you know, we want to make sure that we are thorough in covering off both outstanding issues that perhaps the forest industry has had around regulation and law and trying to project into the future what might help the industry in coming years. I mean, I find that there are some elements of both of those things in here, but I guess at first blush, I find it not to be particularly ambitious, right?

This bill sort of dances around some outstanding issues that I know the forest industry had concerns about, but it doesn't move to, I guess, the heart of the issue that we're dealing with not just in the forest industry but in regard to our economy in general. We all know that Alberta is experiencing an economic downturn and that we look for ways by which we can diversify our economy and look for growth in any which way we can, quite frankly. Of course, the forest industry is not insignificant. According to GOA numbers it's, like, a \$6.5 billion industry. Perhaps it's even more than that. I noticed that there's some noted growth, especially in producing lumber here in the province. I'm not as familiar with fibre as to whether that part of the industry is growing or not, but I suspect it's at least holding steady. Quite a number of Albertans work in the industry, too, according to the same GOA numbers: 18,000, 19,000 people, right?

So it looks like sort of a bright spot for us to perhaps make more sort of bold ways by which we can support the industry and make sure that the industry has room to grow and will be sustainable into the future as well, because, of course, it's not unlike – I mean, of course, it's different from the energy industry because it is a renewable resource, but I would venture to say, Madam Speaker, that at every juncture we need to make sure we quantify and make substantial just how sustainable the industry really is. So if we make a statement about sustainability, I would say that it's incumbent upon the government to try to quantify what resources we have, assets we have in terms of potential for lumber and for fibre and to develop a plan with industry to make sure that there's a sustainable way to move forward on that so that literally the trees are growing at the rate by which we harvest them, and then there's a new bunch that are ready to go when we need them.

I know it's not an exact industry by any means, but, you know, I think that is a way by which forestry aspires to approach the renewable resource that they have, and I would like to see that reflected more specifically in legislation, especially new legislation. We're making amendments to an act that was pretty much functioning as it was since 1971, I think. Is that the number that I heard? Yeah. That's a long time ago. I mean, some things don't change. The basics of the forest industry remain the same. Perhaps where we've seen it develop over the last almost 50 years, I guess, is in a greater appreciation of sustainable practice and so forth, that industry does aspire to.

Of course, you can only have sustainability and environmental awareness through government regulation, because if you don't have a standard which everyone is following, from the various companies and corporations that harvest lumber, the individuals that own a sawmill on the side to, you know, some of the biggest forest companies in the world – if there's not a standard which everyone must adhere to, then it's like not having laws or not having

speed limits on roads and so forth. I mean, these are the kinds of things that I definitely look to.

One of the things that changed my more enthusiastic thought about this bill was when we were discussing it this week – and I didn't have a chance till now, but I will now – who in terms of First Nations were consulted on this act? You know, the act is being updated for the first time in more than a generation, and I'm just really curious to know if the responsibility of the ministry and the responsibility of the government of Alberta to consult with First Nations on this issue was in fact met.

If it wasn't, it seems to be just an obvious, glaring error and fault in this bill, that we could always, of course, fix – right? – in the due course of how this Legislature works. But if that has been found wanting, then I would suggest that job number one is to in fact go back and have a proper consultation process with First Nations in regard to the future of the forest industry. Anything less than that would be irresponsible and would be a poor economic choice, too, because, of course, if you do move ahead on something that has not been covered in the full breadth of legal responsibility, then you end up undermining the business itself, quite frankly, in ways that no one wants. So I just would like to hear more about the consultation that did take place around Bill 40 and to see if that meets the standard of responsibility which this government must adhere to.

Another issue that just again didn't come to my attention – I kind of knew some of these things were happening, but you see the triangulation coming forward when you see bills like this – is the deal that the province of Alberta signed with the federal government in regard to woodland caribou herds. I mean, while I didn't follow this particular line to the degree that I might have followed education, of course, as a minister, you know, I certainly do recall a lot of the challenges around the woodland caribou herds and the federal responsibility, the federal power of protection that are part of our Canadian law.

I know very well that you need to have a very coherent plan around protection of endangered species because the federal government's laws do prevail in that regard, so I would be curious to know what plan has been built around that issue with the federal government and then how it fits into this bill as well. Again, if there's that kind of loose end kicking around with Bill 40 and amendments to the act, then again I know from observation and some experience that that could really undermine any ambition you might have to grow the industry and to encourage the forestry sector.

Of course, the forestry sector expects no less from the provincial government, too. I mean, they know that that's their job. That's their purview, to make sure that other levels of government are being consulted and covering off the legalities that are associated with that. With First Nations and with the federal government, those things have to be done, and they have to be done through legislation. Here we are with legislation in our hands today, and I want to make sure that that gets done as well.

5:10

As I mentioned in my opening comments, again, because this is sort of like a 50-year opportunity, opening up this act, you know, it's really important that – and I think all Albertans and the industry as well want to make sure that there are sustainable harvesting practices and replanting practices and land management embedded deeply and fundamentally into our forestry legislation here in the province. We can't make any presumptions about that. It always has been the case that we need to be very careful stewards of our forests here in the province but now more so than ever, I would suggest.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Again, we have a growing population and a growing demand for the products that we produce. It is, in normal circumstances, a healthy export market. Again, I can't talk to the fibre industry quite as much, but I know for a fact, listening to the news, that there's a roaring demand for lumber, which is great. But, again, we have to make sure that our harvesting practices are in keeping with our capacity to renew the resource so that we don't chop all the trees down, because suddenly you can go from a roaring boom to a precipice without proper management practices.

The last thing I just wanted to talk about in regard to Bill 40 and things that I am looking for, again, with limited time and space to respond to the economic crisis, partially precipitated by the medical emergency we're in but also the general economic downturn here in the province of Alberta from the changing energy industry, is to make sure that we are looking at pieces of legislation like this through the lens of: what can we produce from this? How can we grow, as it says in the title of the bill, I mean, the forest industry in a tangible, measurable way, right? Again, you can't just put the word "grow" in front of something, and then it makes it so. You have to have a business plan or a partnership with the forest industry to say: well, how are we growing and by how many jobs, and how can this contribute to our GDP, and how can it contribute to the budget of the province of Alberta, too?

Of course, we are talking about a resource that we own together in the public domain. People pay stumpage fees and so forth for that product. Are we making sure that we're getting a fair value for this product, that we own together as Albertans? Are we producing jobs from it? How many? Are we producing revenue for industry? How much? Are we making sure we capture our fair share? How much? Again, I mean, these are all things that I think we as legislators and you as the government – not you, Mr. Speaker, but the members opposite – need to be fleshing out in a way that people can understand. How can we measure that in terms of success and make adjustments along the way in the immediate and long-term future?

Again, you know, we have lots of tough jobs ahead of us, and we need to make sure that every expenditure we make – I mean, again, having a quantifiable expenditure or budget of how these changes might play out, like the way I described it. But if there are any expenses that we're putting forward into this change, we need to know all of those things.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West. Seeing none – oh. Well, there you go. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a brief question or comment.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Up to five minutes, right? Okay. Just wanted to make sure. I want to thank the Speaker for recognizing me and my colleague for the remarks that he was sharing this afternoon. I think that it's important that we consider all perspectives on this legislation and certainly the fact that the member was beginning, I think, to engage in some deeper thoughts. I'd welcome him to continue those and give us an opportunity to consider the impacts. I think that when we're in second, I always appreciate opportunities for questions that the government can reflect on and answer as we proceed through other stages of bills, but specifically if there are areas that might require further amendments, I think it's a good opportunity for us to reflect on some of those as we consider how we can create bills in this place so that all private members feel their voices have been heard and the opportunity to engage in the democratic process has been reflected.

With that, I'll return to my seat. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I appreciate the intervention.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, should he choose to respond.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to live up to that idea of more deeper thoughts about this particular bill in second stage. I mean, one thing that I was just thinking about was that, of course, this government is really shaking the dice considerably with their budget from February and then doubling down on the \$4.7 billion tax reduction for profitable corporations. Of course, I mean, there are some in the forestry industry that would qualify for that kind of thing as well.

Now, what I would expect and hope to do, what I would do if you were making such a bold – I probably would run away from that idea anyway because we know it didn't work the first time. I mean, we saw probably even before COVID at least 50,000 jobs being lost and, you know, a lot of people taking their share of the corporate money and paying it as stock dividends to shareholders and/or moving the money to their headquarters, which are not necessarily even in Canada, right? I mean, you're talking about very fluid companies.

Let's say that that is moving ahead, and we've got to deal with it because that's what this government did. It wasn't a very good idea, but let's try to amend it a little bit, okay? Why wouldn't we say, let's say in the forest industry through this bill, that the corporate tax reduction that some of these companies may have realized – compel people to invest it back into building a more sustainable forest industry here in the province of Alberta, compelling that money to not just be passed to profit, to stock dividends, and leaving the country. Of course, some forestry companies are very large multinational corporations as well. Tie a small amendment to it and say: "Yeah. You know, we want to grow this industry. We're serious about it. We're willing to put some money where our ambitions are, but we want you to spend that money in developing and growing, as the title of this bill suggests, the forestry industry here in Alberta." Simple as that. I mean, I'm sure that this is not an impossible ambition. I would hope that this would be something that would be considered.

This is only second reading, right? Hope springs eternal, Mr. Speaker, in regard to the government making some changes, giving us that information we need to make an informed choice on Bill 40.

With that – do I? Can I? I will try to adjourn debate on this. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West could try to adjourn debate on a Standing Order 29(2)(a). Unfortunately, he is unable to so.

But it seems to me that the hon. Minister of Transportation is on his feet. Perhaps he'd like to do the same.

5:20

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you. I appreciate the hon. member trying to adjourn. I should point out, Mr. Speaker, that the window for that had closed. Nonetheless, I appreciate the effort. I will at this point move to adjourn debate on this bill.

The Speaker: Teamwork does make the dream work, doesn't it, hon. minister?

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 36

Geothermal Resource Development Act

[Adjourned debate November 2: Mr. Schweitzer]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has approximately 14 minutes remaining.

Is there anyone else that wishes to join in the debate? It appears that the hon. Member for Edmonton-South is on his feet.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act. It's something that – I think all of my colleagues here on the opposition side are glad to see a framework like this finally come forward because I know that this certainly has been under way and under development for many years now, indeed at least since 2017. I recall that when we were in government just a few years ago here, what feels like many years ago here now, there was indeed a significant interest in a geothermal industry. Our government, the NDP government, invested in the Hinton geothermal FEED study, invested in funds through Alberta Innovates and Emissions Reduction Alberta and multiple grants to do research on the geothermal resources right here in Alberta, particularly in the western Canada sedimentary basin.

Mr. Speaker, geothermal is one of those industries that can be a growth industry here in Alberta. It has immense opportunity here in Alberta. Before I got involved here in politics, before I came to this Legislature, what feels like many years ago now, I did work in research in high-pressure sensors. High-pressure sensors, for example, is something that is a value-added industry that we can have around these things. They're used, of course, currently in oil and gas, but it's a good example of how many of our skills that are already currently being used in oil and gas – many of the companies that already do research and development here in Alberta in oil and gas can move laterally into a tangential field here, geothermal.

I'm glad the government is bringing forward this framework, and I'm glad the government has continued the work that our government did in terms of things like consultations on the regulations and moving forward and bringing this industry forward.

However, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit concerned that instead of doing targeted supports for the geothermal industry, instead of actually strategically supporting the geothermal industry, the government gave away \$4.7 billion in corporate giveaways that did not help the industry grow. Instead of actually bringing in targeted supports and targeted programs for this industry, we saw 50,000 jobs lost before the pandemic even began. I think what this opposition would like to see and what our opposition would like to see as an opportunity is that the geothermal industry is actually helped to achieve its full potential and that the geothermal industry receives the support that the government is able to offer and should be offering so that we can have this growth of a lateral move for many of our workers here in Alberta. I think it's a good start, but I think that it's lacking on some concrete action.

It's clear that this government's economic strategy was not working and continues to not work, right? It's clear that this government: they keep on bringing in these economic policies. They accelerate their \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway, which is on page 144 of their 2019 budget, Mr. Speaker, so if the ministers opposite are unaware that it was in their budget, perhaps they need to spend some more time reading their own documents. Indeed, it was in their budget, and now they've accelerated it, right? This is their economic strategy.

The reality is that we continue to see record numbers of jobs being lost, we continue to see the program not working, and now we have this opportunity that we could implement targeted

programs to have a growth industry. We could implement targeted programs to transition people with skills that would already be in place, with skills that would only require minimal training, if any training at all, to translate over into this related industry. I mean, that's something that is very interesting and I'm optimistic about, in terms of the growth that we're going to be seeing here in Alberta.

Now, what I'm concerned, Mr. Speaker – I have a few questions, but I also recognize they're fairly technical, so I hope the ministers will have an opportunity to discuss more later. I understand, of course, that as we approach different sections in committee and stuff, we can have longer and more fulsome debate around the minutiae as well.

I have some questions around, for example, how the Crown is not going to be the owner of heat from geothermal resources, right? That instead is going to lie with the mineral rights holder. Mr. Speaker, how does that compare to other jurisdictions? Like, why is the regulatory regime being embedded in the manner it is? Why is the system of royalties being established in the way that it is?

Of course, the bill allows royalties to be collected on geothermal resources that are being used to produce energy here in Alberta, but it allows also that only royalties will be collected – if, for example, it's behind the fence in an ONG facility, it would only be collected on one piece of that. That's something that I have some questions around: why that was chosen as the methodology, why that was chosen as the royalty model, how that compares to other jurisdictions that use extensive geothermal and other types of resources. I think that's a very reasonable question that I'm hoping that the minister will be able to answer for us.

Mr. Speaker, we know the AER is going to be regulating geothermal energy in this bill. The AER is going to be making system-wide rules regarding the range of activities in geothermal development, including the responsible management of sites and issues like that. I'm curious how the AER would be equipped to handle those types of scenarios. How the AER is structured – because, of course, we know the AER was originally designed for our ONG industry. How would that compare to other geothermal regulatory bodies across the world? I mean, I think those are all very reasonable questions that I'm optimistic that this government is going to be able to answer for us, and we're going to be able to see this framework designed in a way that would allow for our geothermal industry to grow.

Mr. Speaker, I think that when we look at this framework being put forward and when we look at this framework being proposed, it is important because it's something that's going to allow us to diversify our economy, right? We know the Finance minister already said in this place that diversification is a luxury, but I'm glad that the minister that brought this bill forward, the Minister of Energy, doesn't agree. I'm glad the Minister of Energy doesn't agree that diversification is a luxury. I'm glad that we're actually moving forward with a diversification strategy here in Alberta. I'm glad that the government is moving forward with trying to implement growth in industries that are not just oil and gas, that are not just in very narrow, targeted sectors. I'm glad that the government is actually putting frameworks forward that affect things other than just their \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway resulted in 50,000 jobs being lost before the pandemic even began, and now that's being accelerated. It hasn't created a single new job. Instead of that, we see that the Minister of Energy doesn't agree with the Finance minister. That's actually a good thing, I think. I think it's a good thing that the Minister of Energy is introducing this bill, is introducing a real plan that helps diversify parts of our industry, that helps diversify and create new jobs here in Alberta, a framework that allows new jobs to be created, rather. I think that

there's an opportunity, if the Minister of Energy continues to push along this path, that we'd be able to actually implement change in a targeted way to create new jobs in Alberta.

The framework right now is enabling, of course. It allows us to talk about these opportunities, but it doesn't actually go out and create those jobs. The Minister of Energy, all they have to do – and it appears that they're already successfully fighting back against the Minister of Finance's, I would say, basically wrong-headed direction of not needing to diversify the economy. I think that's a good thing, that the Minister of Finance is having to walk that back, that the government is having to walk back on what they said originally, that diversification is not a luxury. It's something that we have to push forward with.

I mean, of course, our opposition knows that. Our opposition fully supports diversification. Our opposition fully supports investing in growth industries, investing in value-added industries and things like that. That's why, of course, we launched our consultation process. I know my colleague the critic for agriculture is going to be doing consultation tonight. I know my colleague the critic for Energy did a consultation last night. You can check out those consultations on albertasfuture.ca, Mr. Speaker.

I know that we support this type of growth. We support this type of diversification. We support this type of industry because we know that we need to have a real plan to bring Albertans back to work, to get new jobs for Albertans, to create actual growth in industries that is not just giving \$4.7 billion away to already wealthy, already profitable corporations.

I'm glad that it seems like the Minister of Energy is able to change the Minister of Finance's mind on this. The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, Mr. Speaker – I have to say again that giving \$4.7 billion away to profitable corporations and then accelerating that payout, accelerating that \$4.7 billion to profitable corporations is really, I think, foolhardy.

5:30

It's a fool's errand here, Mr. Speaker, because we saw 50,000 jobs being lost before the pandemic even began. We saw that jobs were lost every single day under this government. We saw that this government has one of the worst records on the economy ever seen in history here in Alberta. We've seen this government repeatedly receive new credit downgrades as well. The government doesn't like to talk about that very much when they are in power. The UCP spoke heavily about credit ratings and credit downgrades in 2015 through 2019, but now they completely ignore the fact that they are also receiving credit downgrades on top of losing over 50,000 jobs before the pandemic began, on top of also giving \$4.7 billion away to already profitable corporations.

I'm glad to see that the Minister of Energy appears to not actually agree with this wrong-headed direction the Minister of Finance is taking this province in, this wrong-headed direction that this government seems to be taking the province in and instead is actually pushing forward some sort of diversification plan, instead is actually putting forward a framework that allows us to talk about how we would create new jobs, allows us to say: we need a different economic strategy; we need an economic strategy like the opposition is presenting at albertasfuture.ca. That's why I'm glad this Minister of Energy was able to present Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, I think it's pretty interesting. I think it's pretty interesting, the stark contrast we see in some pieces of legislation with what the government is actually saying. The government is saying that their \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway is working. The government is saying that they're doing a really great job on the economy, and we know it's not true. We know it's not true because 50,000 jobs were

lost before the pandemic began. Because of this, we know that they are accelerating that \$4.7 billion giveaway, and we know that the government said that bills like this, bills that created frameworks for alternative development and alternative industries in Alberta, what we call diversification here in Alberta, bills like this – the Finance minister actually stood in this place and said that that was a luxury. That's something that I think is absolutely ridiculous, so I'm glad to see that the government has changed their course. I'm glad to see that the government has seen the error of their ways. I'm glad to see that perhaps other ministers have convinced the Minister of Finance that he needs to reconsider his position, Mr. Speaker, because it was clear that that minister's plan was not working. We saw credit downgrades. We saw jobs being lost. We saw families paying more and getting less. That's the reality of what we were seeing.

I'm glad that we're seeing some movement towards a policy that was started under our government. Of course, I already spoke about things like how we started, began investment in Hinton's geothermal FEED study. We did a lot of funding through Alberta Innovates and Emissions Reduction Alberta under the NDP government, and now the fruit of that work is being taken over by the UCP government and actually implemented into a framework. I think that's a great thing. I think it's a great thing because we have that continuity here in this place that our government, the NDP government, in 2017 began many of these consultations on things like regulations, began many of these consultations on what those processes should look like, began the investment to do the feasibility studies, for example, through Alberta Innovates, at the University of Alberta to map geothermal resources. Doing all these processes, we now have the opportunity that the current government, the Conservative government, is able to benefit from the work that the NDP did ahead of time, is able to benefit and actually take notes and move forward with a plan that may actually have the opportunity to help Alberta workers and may actually have the opportunity to help Alberta families, Mr. Speaker.

We know that the government is taking notes when we do our consultations. We know the government is taking notes when they look at albertasfuture.ca, for example, Mr. Speaker, because we know, by looking at this bill, by looking at the Geothermal Resource Development Act, that diversification is no longer just that luxury that the Minister of Finance was talking about. It's actually a way to create jobs for families, it's actually a way to get people back to work here in Alberta, it's actually a way to offset some of those 50,000 jobs lost before the pandemic that are the fault of this government, that are the responsibility of this government's \$4.7 billion giveaway to already wealthy and already profitable corporations.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's a good thing. I think it's a good thing that the Minister of Energy is able to bring this forward. I think it's a good thing that we're going to be able to see engineers go back to work. I think it's a good thing that we're going to be able to see tradespeople go back to work. I think it's a good thing that we have this framework that is going to create the structure for us to begin investment. But I think the minister needs to do more. I think the minister needs to continue to push the Finance minister, needs to continue to push the Premier, and needs to continue to say that we need targeted investments in these fields, we need targeted programs that actually encourage these developments, that actually encourage these programs, that actually encourage the industry to hire more people, to get Albertans back to work, to actually encourage companies to hire Albertans, to actually invest early on through programs like Alberta Innovates, to actually invest in these companies so that we can create new Alberta jobs, we can create

good jobs that require minimal transition training, require minimal retraining for workers, whether it's a tradesperson or otherwise.

I think that's something that we're pleased with in terms of what the opportunity is going to be. What we're disappointed with is that it doesn't do any of those things right now, Mr. Speaker, that we don't see any of those targeted investments. We don't see any of that targeted support right now, but we're pleased that the government is at least trying to move towards the right direction. The government is at least trying to move towards the right path and understand that diversification is required, understand that people are suffering under this government, people are losing their jobs, families are paying more and getting less because of this government's \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway, because of the 50,000 jobs lost under this government before the pandemic.

I think we're pleased that they finally admit the error of their ways and they bring forward a piece of legislation like this, that actually helps to create new jobs in Alberta.

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

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to provide additional debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to speak to this Bill 36 for my first time in second reading and to thank the Member for Edmonton-South for, you know, a really good review of a number of issues that are before us with regard to this bill, a bill that holds potential, great potential, for Alberta's energy future.

We all want that future to continue, but we know that this particular bill talks to a clean and renewable kind of energy and takes advantage of the skills and the expertise of Albertans who are in the energy sector, the supply side of all of the trades that are a part of that sector. We have that right here at home. It's something that not only my colleague from Edmonton-South has talked about but my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, in terms of being the critic for this area, has also spent time talking about. As my colleague mentioned, albertasfuture.ca is our effort as the NDP caucus to put forward ideas that will help the diversification of this province's sectors because for far too long we've relied on a real finite, small number of sectors to drive the prosperity of this province.

Now things are changing, and we need to look at diversification. Thank goodness for things like agriculture doing well. There's a good harvest, a record harvest, being talked about across the way and certainly as well on our side. Forestry is doing great with revenues coming in and royalties being paid for the cutting of timber in this province. Diversification in those two areas, those two sectors, is certainly helping right this province, though there's a great deal we need to still do. You know, with the eventual addressing of COVID with a vaccine and the confidence returning to people and the opening up of the economy, tourism holds great promise in this province.

But we're talking about Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act. I was pleased to open up the act and read the first 26 pages, which really kind of outline how it will be inserted into the understanding of the energy sector. With regard to the purpose of the act right off the bat 3(1)(a) talks about: "to provide for the economic, orderly, efficient and responsible development [of it] in the public interest of geothermal resources in Alberta." Just on that point, you know, a personal point, I know people who have been involved in looking at geothermal opportunities on abandoned or suspended wells throughout Alberta.

5:40

It's not all wells in Alberta, obviously. We're talking about really deep wells, and I've learned from my acquaintance, friend that we're talking about only a specific kind of deep well and specific formations of the geological ground in this province that will be the kind of wells abandoned or suspended that will provide this geothermal heat. I'm not sure if it's in the bill, but I did read somewhere that we're talking about three kilometres, 3,000 metres down below something called the – I won't find it off the bat – but the base of groundwater, which is really, really far down.

You know, pursuing this kind of innovative project and seeing investment go to this kind of innovation – as I said, it's green – will benefit Alberta in all kinds of ways to diversify our economy.

When I was reading this act, this bill, it seemed like the lion's share of it had to do with the AER and the way it will regulate and the way it will be involved with inspecting, suspending, cancelling licences, et cetera, and how the liabilities will be put on to either the owner of the well or the licensee of the groundwater who's using that well. I'm not sure that that was all that riveting, but it's good to know that there is that kind of concern for Albertans' environment and our public health, to know that there's a regime that will step in.

But it did make me wonder about the ability to regulate, to have the people involved to be on the ground to inspect and to do all of that work that's been talked about for most of the bill here with regard to the AER. Frankly, I don't know about the resources AER has for staffing, but I know that the expectation on staff in this case, whether they're actual people who work for the AER or people who are designated to work for the AER, to inspect it, et cetera, the expectations on them would be very, very high, after reading the kinds of criteria that they have to fulfill in this bill. So that's a question I have. You know, are there going to be the people, are there going to be the horses on the ground to make sure that everything is up to snuff?

We, of course, as my colleague for Edmonton-South spoke of just a few minutes ago, the NDP government, in 2017 started this work, and I'm glad that it's continued on under the auspices of the UCP government because in a way it's a nonpartisan effort to know that we need to diversify our economy, to repair the huge numbers, legions of people who are out of work in this province but who have the skills and abilities to be put in service for this kind of sectoral diversification. That person that I mentioned who spoke to me about this was in that situation where they haven't been working for a period of time, and they see this as an opportunity to get back to using their skills and abilities, using some of their investment monies that they have and working with colleagues who are similarly looking for opportunity to invest but also to work. You know, they've been somewhat frustrated because this framework hasn't been before us sooner. I'm glad that we're talking about not only a regulatory regime but a framework for this kind of industry to take place.

I want to also – as my colleague from Edmonton-South kind of talked about, this time in Alberta is critical. As we all know, we're collectively fighting COVID and the implications that that's had on our economy and our people and our mindset as a province and as a country, and we need some good news. As people across the way were talking about earlier – or maybe it was listening to a presentation earlier in the day at RMA – we need some hope in this province. This is the kind of thing that will endeavour to give Albertans that kind of hope. If we can see a geothermal industry come on that is clean and provides energy, electricity, or is a cogen situation with a manufacturing industry or industrial manufacturing and we can use, as a result, less fossil fuels, that's the kind of thing

that starts to turn people's views around with regard to what Alberta is all about. We desperately need that, obviously.

Somebody was talking about environmental stewardship and governance earlier today, and they were saying that that weighs very little on investors' beliefs about where to put their funds. But I can tell you that, you know, the environment, stewardship, social, and governance are critical factors. Large investment companies who have investment banks are looking for those things, ESG, as much as they are looking for a return on equity. They're looking for a long-term play that they can know that the shareholders and different companies that they work for will not reject outright, will say: we're confident in this investment. Like many of you here, I have investments across my personal portfolios, and that's one of the things that I look for in addition to: what is the ultimate aim of the product? What does it ultimately do? The ones that are involved in the defence industry perhaps don't get a nod, but ones that are involved in diversifying the economy in this way, from my perspective, would get a nod and would get an investment.

I'm glad, as we've all said, to see this framework come forward. We need to start to see concrete action take place so that Alberta can start to turn that corner and hope can start to return. We want the geothermal heat that's recovered to – I do, personally – replace fossil fuels over time. It's going to take some time for this industry to get up and running, but these are the first steps. A bill before us that members of this House can support is the first step in making this happen. It doesn't mean that we won't have recommendations or amendments come forward.

At this point in time these are my thoughts with regard to Bill 36. I'll have the opportunity to complete the reading of the rest of it because that's critical as well in terms of due diligence for me and the people I represent in Calgary-Buffalo.

Just one last thought with regard to the current economic strategy of the government of Alberta. I think this bill gives the current government an opportunity to say that they are interested in diversification, that they are actually walking the talk of diversification instead of, as we know, the Finance minister saying that diversification was a luxury. It's not a luxury. We all know that. Leaning on one industry for a long time has put us in a position where, with the drop in the world price of oil, Alberta's fortunes similarly fell. We can do better in this province. We have the wherewithal to do better.

Mr. Speaker, I'll take my place, and thank you for your time.

5:50

The Speaker: My pleasure.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise. This is actually my first time rising to speak on Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act, and it's my pleasure to do so for many of the reasons that my colleagues and members generally in this House have spoken to, which are that we know that geothermal development holds a great potential for Alberta's energy future. It certainly makes sense for a lot of reasons, particularly in Alberta.

We know that geothermal energy has the opportunity to be incredibly – it's clean, it's renewable, and it really fits in well with that strong oil and gas sector that we have in this province right now and takes advantage of the skills and learnings that we already have in place because of our oil and gas sector. It's an untapped resource in many ways, but it is also an opportunity to put back to work a lot of Albertans who have been struggling and have been affected deeply by the economic recession we've been facing and our

struggling oil and gas sector. The opportunity to find newer, cleaner, more renewable sources of energy while at the same time putting to work the great skills and expertise that we already have in this province and putting Albertans back to work is obviously a great combination and a remarkable opportunity.

We are pleased, of course, to see that this government is bringing forward and has carried forward some of the work that the former NDP government did to start to develop the structure and the regulatory framework for geothermal resource development in Alberta. Of course, you know, we want to really position ourselves. If we want to attract investment and creation of new jobs in this province, we have to really position ourselves as being creative and innovative, and that is about diversifying our economy, Mr. Speaker. It's something that has been part of what the Alberta NDP government did when they were in power and has continued to talk about relentlessly. It's something that many Albertans have been talking about for decades, but there has been no real commitment to do any of that work until the former NDP government started to take a lot of work and focus on diversification.

We are in support of greater opportunities to diversify our energy industry. We've talked about the fact that energy really captures a great deal of things, not just oil and gas. It does capture wind, it does capture solar, and, of course, it does capture geothermal. Diversifying our economy has been a necessity. It's not a luxury. It is a necessity that we have recognized for some time, and I'm pleased to see that this bill has come forward, carrying forward the work of the Alberta NDP government before.

But I'm also excited about the geothermal policy proposal that our caucus is putting forward as part of albertasfuture.ca to really talk about an economic strategy for all that focuses on new job creation, focuses on economic security, that leaves nobody behind, that talks about rising to the top as opposed to a race to the bottom, and that really talks about diversifying so we can be that creative, innovative province that I know Alberta already is. We are excited about this.

I do know that a regulatory framework is important. It's a step in the right direction. There are questions that I have and that I'm certain some of my colleagues have already raised, particularly – although I can't say for certain, I know that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, given that she is the critic for the Energy file, as well spends a great deal of time, like I do, looking at legal opinions. I'm certain that she has spoken already about some very good questions that have arisen about the ownership of geothermal resources and energy.

I know that those questions have come forward; namely, Nigel Bankes, who is a well-respected lawyer in this field, in energy resource development, issued a great comment just asking questions about that very question: who would own the geothermal resource? We know that, as it's described in Bill 36, for reasons I'm hoping the government will speak to, they chose not to take the same approach that has been taken in British Columbia, where in their legislation they made it clear that the right, title, and interest in all geothermal resources in British Columbia are vested in and reserved to the government, and the government may dispose of them only under their act, the B.C. act. That's their Geothermal Resources Act, for reference, Mr. Speaker.

Unlike that approach, in Bill 36 we see reference to the mineral owner having the rights. While it's my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that in 80 per cent of the cases the province of Alberta is the mineral

owner, that's not always the case. In 20 per cent, I understand, of situations the government of Alberta is not the mineral resource owner. That raises questions, I think, about what the intent is behind the act as to: who does hold the rights?

We do know that ensuring that we have ownership over our natural resources is an important part of the strength of our economy and has always been a strength in Alberta. We take that seriously when it comes to oil and gas. We should be looking at very carefully: who do we want to be the owner of geothermal resources? I'm looking forward to hearing from the minister who brought forward this bill for clarification as to what the intent is and how that will be managed because I think that if we're going to simply model this after the oil and gas sector, which is what it looks like the regulations do – they very much mirror what happens with oil and gas, refer to the Alberta Energy Regulator – we need to make sure that we are very clear about that very critical question for all Albertans: who will own the resource that is developed?

I also want to add, Mr. Speaker, that I think it's also critical that we take a look at ensuring that we've addressed the issue of liability for orphan wells and how that process will be handled. We know that's a big issue within the oil and gas sector. It's an environmental liability that we should all be concerned about, so we need to make sure that – if we're talking about geothermal being part of the existing oil and gas system, where does the liability for orphaned wells lie if they're taken over and managed for geothermal? Those are the questions that I think a lot of Albertans will want to know, and I hope that we can talk about that in an open way in this House, because I think we are united in this House in understanding that we do need a geothermal resource development framework, and making sure that we have one is critically important.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at the clock, and I'm cognizant of the fact that we are quickly approaching a time when we'll be adjourning. If I may, I just want to comment on something. I will be looking forward to speaking much more fulsomely on Bill 36 as this goes through progressive readings, assuming that it is passed through second reading, and to contributing to that debate.

But I know that there's one thing that's probably pressing on a lot of people's minds right now as our dinner break is happening soon and many of the members will probably go home. We will be having a sitting this evening, I understand, I believe. Of course, that is the election going on in the United States. Like many people across North America, across the world, I'm sure a lot of us will be watching that with great anticipation, great anxiety. I know that I myself certainly plan to spend most of the evening, after putting my kids to bed, probably stress eating and watching the election results. Certainly, I hope that what happens tonight is an opportunity for change in the world right now, and I have great hope in the American people in making a decision that's right for them. I also hope for the safety and well-being for all because we do know that this is a very contentious election, and I just want to express my wishes for the outcome of this election, that there is safety for all people.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 3(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	2945
Members' Statements	
Motions on Alberta in the Canadian Federation	2945
Role of Government	2945
Junior Hockey.....	2945
Economic Diversification	2946
Movember	2946
Postsecondary Tuition and Student Loans.....	2946
Energy Industry Investment in Alberta.....	2946
Rural Internet.....	2947
National Debt	2947
Oral Question Period	
COVID-19 Testing, Contact Tracing, and Modelling	2947
Alberta Separatism	2948
Corporate Taxation and Job Creation	2948
Automobile Insurance Premiums	2949
Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction Program	2949
Health System Concerns.....	2950
COVID-19 Outbreak at the Calgary Correctional Centre.....	2951
Junior Hockey.....	2951
Road and Bridge Construction Funding	2952
Music Industry Support	2952
Aviation and Aerospace Industry Development	2953
Crowsnest Pass Coal Mine Proposal	2953
COVID-19 Protective Measures and Economic Recovery	2954
Prussian Carp.....	2954
First Nations Police Services	2955
Notices of Motions	2956
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 43 Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act	2956
Bill 44 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2020	2956
Tabling Returns and Reports	2956
Orders of the Day	2960
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 38 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020	2960
Bill 40 Forests (Growing Alberta's Forest Sector) Amendment Act, 2020	2965
Bill 36 Geothermal Resource Development Act	2974

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