



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 16, 2020

Day 65

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 16, 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.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing – and by singing I mean the playing – of our national anthem by the Filipino-Canadian Saranay Association of Alberta. In observation of the COVID-19 public health guidelines, please refrain from singing in the language of your choice.

Ms Pagtakhan:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all our sons command.

[Lyrics in Filipino]

God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would like you to join me in again welcoming members of the Filipino-Canadian Saranay Association of Alberta. I thought they did a spectacular job. Unfortunately, we had reduced numbers due to the COVID-19 public health pandemic; otherwise, we would have had twice as many. I hope you'll join me in welcoming them again. Go ahead.

Also in the gallery this afternoon: guests of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Please welcome Karlana Noel. Please rise.

Members' Statements

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

Max Ward

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand to honour Max Ward, one of Canada's true aviation pioneers, who, sadly, took his last flight into the heavens on November 2. Many may know Mr. Ward as a member of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, the Canadian Business Hall of Fame, and as a member of Alberta's Order of Excellence, but more impressive than his titles, Mr. Ward's life will always be remembered as one of Canada's most lofty adventurers. Mr. Ward began his flying career during the Second World War as a flight instructor with the British Commonwealth air training plan, where he trained Allied pilots to defend the skies over Europe.

Mr. Ward later took his passion for aviation and his entrepreneurial spirit and began his own flying service with a single De Havilland Fox Moth biplane, where he pioneered air services across Canada's rugged north. While Mr. Ward's flying services

mapped and connected Canada's remote airstrips, his horizons would continue to expand with the establishment of Edmonton-based Wardair, that eventually took flight as a renowned international carrier with a fleet of then iconic Boeing 747s. Mr. Ward's ambitions for Wardair brought affordable yet luxurious air travel to Canadians, opening up the world through his vision and love for aviation, which started with his ever-loyal employees long before it hit the Royal Doulton dishes his loyal passengers dined on.

With Mr. Ward it didn't matter if you worked on the tarmac at Edmonton International, on the line maintenance team, or serving a hot meal at 30,000 feet above the Pacific. It was never a surprise for him to approach with a warm smile to see how things were going. Mr. Ward's legacy will be forever associated with bringing the wonders of air travel to everyday Canadians while those who were employed by him, including the mother of our own Minister of Health, felt as if they were part of a family that endures to this day.

Mr. Ward, you will be greatly missed by all who knew or knew of you, and we tip our wings in thanks for inspiring aviation leaders and entrepreneurs in our great province for generations to come.

Thank you.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

COVID-19 and Seniors

Ms Sigurdson: The Premier minimizes the tragic loss of life from COVID-19. In May he said that the average age of death from COVID-19 was only 83 and that since life expectancy in Alberta is 82, we're doing well. Recently he downplayed deaths from COVID-19 again by saying that it is only the 11th most common cause of death this year and that it is just a tiny proportion of deaths in the province. These comments are disgraceful and show how devoid of empathy this Premier and government are towards seniors. As of Thursday there have been over 250 deaths from COVID-19 in continuing care. These deaths were preventable, something that this Premier has failed to acknowledge as he minimizes the tragic losses. The families grieving these losses deserve better.

This UCP government is not doing enough to ensure seniors are taken care of in Alberta. There needs to be a public inquiry. Continuing care is in crisis. In the South Terrace centre in Edmonton over 90 per cent of residents have tested positive for COVID-19. There are over 50 outbreaks in continuing care centres across the province; three of them have over 100 cases. COVID-19 is creating challenges for all Albertans. It is particularly difficult and isolating for seniors. Alberta's seniors deserve a government that cares whether they live or die. Instead, we have a government that has ignored the crisis and has gone out of its way to create further chaos in health care. This government has the audacity to drive doctors out of the province, fire 11,000 staff, and laid out plans to make life more expensive for seniors in continuing care. The UCP should be expanding and protecting staff in continuing care. Our health care system should be strengthened, not attacked. When a senior dies of COVID-19, they are not simply a statistic. When will the UCP do the right thing and ensure seniors are safe in this province?

Larry Spilak

Mr. Sigurdson: Madam Speaker, I am saddened to announce that on November 6 Larry Spilak passed away after losing a battle with cancer. Larry served as a Foothills county councillor for over 13 years, serving as the reeve for nine. I personally met Larry six years ago while serving on the PC constituency board, and I was

honoured to have the time with him that I did. Though he may not have known it, Larry was a mentor to me.

[The Speaker in the chair]

His commitment to building a stronger future for his community was admirable. His commitment and dedication to improving the lives of those in his community should be a benchmark for anyone in public service. It most certainly is a benchmark that I have set for myself. Larry's passing has been a time of reflection for me as I look at the changing landscape of Alberta. In the time that he served on the Foothills county council, he also served on 25 additional boards and committees. He was generous with his time and his expertise, and he made sure that he always was available to lend an ear or a hand when needed.

In an article penned shortly after his passing, Ryan Payne, CAO, stated, quote: he was a champion of the county, a trusted colleague, and a dear friend; it was just always a pleasure to work with him; he had such a strong business acumen and an understanding of what working in a team environment involved. I cannot agree more. Larry was an incredible advocate for his ward and his county, a leader in his community, a respected colleague, and a dear friend. He served in his position with the utmost dignity and respect.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, although funerals may look different due to gathering restrictions, his family will still be celebrating his life this week at the St. James Parish. I ask that everyone in this House take a moment to recognize the importance of all of those, like Larry, who served their communities.

Larry Spilak, you will be missed.

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Member Loyola: Alberta small businesses are angry with inaction from this UCP government. We are now entering the second wave, and this government has started shutting businesses and increasing restrictions without any form of support to owners and their employees.

Small-business owners have been calling for your government to take action for months now, but this Premier shamefully continues to ignore them. While local establishments across this province closed, your government doubled down on its failed \$4.7 billion corporate handout. Instead of investing in Alberta businesses who create thousands right here in this province, this Premier chose to give billions to already-profitable international corporations.

But my colleagues and I did not ignore them. We took the time to listen to their struggles. The Alberta NDP, with the input of small-business owners across this province, developed a seven-point plan that will give Alberta small businesses a chance to get through this second wave.

We're calling on the government to develop a clear, evidence-based index that will give small businesses a chance to plan if they are moving up or down in our relaunch plan. We have also called for the reinstatement of the commercial eviction ban for another six months and for the provincial government to match up to the 25 per cent of the federal lockdown grant so owners do not have to worry about being forced out and also for the expansion of the Alberta relaunch grant so hard-hit businesses can receive another \$10,000 in support to use as they see fit.

We cannot rely on small businesses to shoulder more debt without any financial support, and I'm hoping that this government puts its ego aside and implements these supports, because the more this Premier waits, the more small businesses will close and even more Albertans will be unemployed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a statement to make.

Camrose Kodiaks Junior Hockey Team

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most loved groups in the Camrose constituency is the AJHL Camrose Kodiaks. The Kodiaks were added to the AJHL in 1997. Though they missed the playoffs in their first season, they qualified for the playoffs in every season since. The Kodiaks have won six south division titles, five league championships, five Doyle Cups for the regional championship, three silver medals at the National Junior A Championship, and one Canadian National Junior A Championship.

The Kodiaks are an extremely important part of our community and have contributed in many ways. Their involvement with the Relay for Life, Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, and a multitude of other community initiatives has not gone unnoticed. In fact, they are also dedicated to being exemplary role models for youth and play an active part in the reading with the Kodiaks program, which is a huge success in Camrose and area schools.

I recently had the opportunity to wear Carson Brisson's number 37 jersey at the Legislature in support of the commencement of the AJHL season. In addition, I had the opportunity to meet the entire team and was very happy to learn that all members are proud to be from the west, specifically Alberta and Saskatchewan.

It was also a pleasure to meet Lee Katchur, who is one of the billet co-ordinators. I also enjoyed a great conversation with Clayton Jardine, who is the head coach of this talented group. The Kodiaks' general manager, Boris, and Tim with New Country 98.5 invited me to participate in their online radio show. I enjoyed the opportunity to have a great dialogue and answer questions.

Through community spirit and support, Camrose is able to accommodate these young players. We are so proud of our team as a community, and I wish the team the very best this season. Go Kodiaks. Woo-hoo!

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

Health and Economy

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A terrible dichotomy has been allowed to emerge recently that society and its servant, the provincial government, has but one of two choices: to either focus on the health and well-being of the citizens of Alberta or to foster the economy with the hope that Albertans will ultimately derive the benefits. Health versus the economy. Well-being versus wealth. It is unfortunate that this myopic and false choice has been nurtured by this UCP government.

Recently I've had the privilege of participating in many conversations with Albertans that have a different view. They have learned hard lessons from the oculus that is COVID, and what has been revealed is an economic reality that is often inequitable and uneven in its rewards, a system that benefits many but also leaves vulnerable many others. What Albertans are telling me is that as we emerge from this pandemic, we need to not only rebuild but to rejuvenate with a new purpose. Rather than submitting to a false choice of health versus the economy, we need to merge the two into a unified goal, neither health nor the economy but both.

Albertans understand that the old economy provided us with many benefits, but it is old. We cannot return to visions of the past with expectations of rescue. Instead, we should be brave and forge our own future. We need to diversify the resources on which we depend and diversify the way in which we share those benefits among us. We are a great oil and gas economy, and we can equally

be a great hydrogen and high-tech and medical research and fine arts and tourism economy, but we cannot do that by destroying the structures of success that have been set into place by generations of Albertans.

The economy of the future needs entrepreneurship closely aligned with excellence in university research. The economy of the future needs employees who have benefited from excellence in education and excellence in health. The economy of the future needs jobs that focus on the well-being of us all. We can do this if we accept the challenge before us and dare to not shrink from a vision that reaches just beyond our grasp.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has the call.

Health Services Review Implementation Plan

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have many constituents asking about the Alberta Health Services review plan. Today I would like to call out the blatant fearmongering about our government cutting front-line nurses and clinical staff. Let me be very clear. There will be no job losses for nurses, doctors, and other front-line clinical staff members. This fearmongering is wrong and only serves to hurt Albertans. Our government values health care and would never sacrifice quality of care to save a few bucks, but we are cutting inefficiencies.

Mr. Speaker, times are tough, money is tight, and frustrations are growing because of the increased wait times. Lowering wait times is too important. Savings from the reduction of over 100 management-level positions is necessary. These savings will be reinvested in Albertans' health care. We are removing redundant managerial positions because we want to make health care more efficient and patient centred. We are in the middle of a global pandemic, and it is now more important than ever that we lessen wait times and ensure Albertans' health needs are met.

AHS was due for a review, and in order to improve efficiencies and improve patient care, our government found ways to achieve better results. Overcoming the mismanagement of previous governments requires real bold action. Yes, laundry and community lab services will be contracted out. However, approximately 70 per cent of community lab services and laundry services is already done by private contractors. Mr. Speaker, it will take time to make these services better, and the vendors will be selected through a vigorous competitive process that is free from government interference.

As the representative for Airdrie-East I can say with certainty that all decisions that impact the livelihoods of Albertans are taken seriously. Mr. Speaker, the choices we make in this Chamber don't just affect Albertans outside of this room but everyone in it as well. These decisions that we make as a government affect us all. We are all Albertans.

Disability Workers

Ms Renaud: There are tens of thousands of disability workers in Alberta. The vast majority are women and work multiple jobs because most are paid just above the minimum wage. This is an educated, highly skilled workforce, and the scope of work is massive. Disability workers help people find jobs, prepare for interviews, learn bus routes, skill acquisition. They help with grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, budgeting. They support people with complex medical needs with medication, tube feeding, equipment maintenance. They provide hand-over-hand assistance for handwashing and putting on masks. They help with personal care: bathing, dressing, eating. Some learn sign language or master software so they can communicate with the people they

support. Disability workers are very skilled at supporting people with complex behaviours that can range from aggression to extreme self-injury.

COVID has meant longer hours, massive changes in routines, supporting disabled Albertans in isolation and quarantine, dealing with ever-changing public health measures, and spiking staffing changes. This is an exhausted and overwhelmed workforce. Disability workers are underpaid, and too many do not have access to appropriate benefits or even two weeks of sick time. Only 10 per cent of the workforce are in the public sector, yet this is the group the UCP has decided makes too much money, so they're privatizing during a pandemic, another dangerous UCP race to the bottom.

We will continue to oppose dangerous changes while preparing to introduce systemic ones in 2023 because we know there is a better way forward, and that way forward is not based on taking from some of the lowest paid workers in this province to pay for a \$4.7 billion giveaway. A simple thanks isn't enough, but on behalf of myself and my colleagues I sincerely thank community disability workers.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Statistics and Modelling

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second wave is here. Alberta is approaching 10,000 active cases, roughly 1,000 new cases every day this weekend. Front-line health workers have sounded the alarm for weeks, but this Premier has ignored them. Now almost every major hospital is dealing with outbreaks, and this weekend a leaked memo from AHS shows that cases will double within two weeks. ICU admissions will hit 120, 50 more than current capacity. Why is the Premier hiding the numbers, why does he keep waiting for things to get worse, and why won't he show leadership to flatten the curve?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not true at all. Of course we are taking measures. We announced new measures. The Premier announced new measures last week. We are very concerned on this side for the families and the patients throughout the province who are experiencing this as well as the doctors and nurses, in particular those who are in our ICUs, for the stressful circumstances they're in during this pandemic. We thank them for all their hard work. We are in constant contact with AHS, and we will make sure that AHS has all of the resources, any and all resources they need, to continue to make sure that anybody in this province who is critically ill gets the care that they need.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the existence of that memo proves that the Premier does actually have updated modelling and is simply refusing to share it with the public. Meanwhile the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the University of Washington's independent health research centre, is releasing data on Alberta. Their best case scenario for our province right now is around 3,700 new cases per day by January 1. Can the minister tell us if Alberta Health's projections are the same, and if not, will he finally tell us why and what those projections actually are?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, we already did our modelling in the spring, and that's been disclosed publicly. I'd also remind the member that Dr. Hinshaw has made many remarks regarding

modelling. They're not a prediction of the future. They're not about where we're going to step, but they are like a flashlight that can help light the way on where we might be going in the future. We'll continue to work within those numbers and make sure that we are actively looking to make sure AHS has the resources they need to be able to make sure that everybody in this province who is critically ill gets the care that they need.

Ms Notley: In fact, what's happening is that they are actively keeping information from Albertans.

Now, this Premier did nothing, and experts say that we are now well past the point where a liquor curfew is enough. "People won't go back to a normal life and consumer demand won't really recover if the virus is spreading . . . We need to contain the virus to allow for a real economic recovery." That's a report from the National Bureau of Economic Research. Put another way, the cost of uncontrolled spread is greater on the economy than the cost of targeted measures. When will this government act to protect Albertans?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I'll answer that question: in January. In January we started to take steps to make sure that this province was prepared. We started to make sure that we had the PPE that we needed in this province for the first and future waves. In fact, we were even able to share PPE with other provinces. We made sure that we built up a testing system that's the most robust in the country to be able to respond to the pandemic. We gave 170 million more dollars to our continuing care operators to make sure that those folks are able to protect their staff and their residents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

COVID-19 Statistics and Health System Capacity

Ms Notley: What this government has done is fail. Alberta's new case rate is growing more than twice as fast as British Columbia's and three times as fast as Ontario's, for heaven's sake. Now, separate and apart from the economic impacts, this government is ignoring the fact that our health system is now in jeopardy because of their inaction. Quote: COVID-19 is returning with a vengeance; my incredible team is becoming deflated; we are all at a breaking point, and the system is failing. That's an RN from the Grey Nuns emergency department. Does this minister not understand that his complete lack of action is walking us into an imminent health care collapse?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. As I said, we've built up the most robust testing system in the country. Our lower death rate is a testament to the fact that we are taking this more seriously than other provinces. I will note that our deaths per 100,000 is 6.7. It's three times less than Ontario's. It is 10 times less than Quebec's. We have also provided 40 million masks for Albertans throughout the spring. We have taken this more seriously, quite frankly, than other jurisdictions. We will continue to make sure as well that our capacity is there for AHS to make sure that anyone who is critically ill will get the care that they need in this province.

Ms Notley: The only province that we are not doing worse than is Manitoba, and it's that minister's fault. Quote: we're shattered; the already-exhausted lines of clinical people get stretched even thinner. That's Dr. Peter Brindley, an ICU doctor at the U of A. Right now every time a health care worker tests positive, about six

other staff have to isolate. That means remaining staff have to work double shifts just to provide basic care, let alone deal with COVID. This can't go on. When will this government take action, or are they really going to let COVID destroy our health care system for all Albertans?

Mr. Shandro: None of that is true, Mr. Speaker. We announced new measures last week and will continue to make sure that there are measures in place, and we will continue to review those measures and continue to announce new ones, but they will be based on the evidence. They will be based on the advice of our medical professionals like Dr. Hinshaw. They will be focused. It will be minimizing business obstruction, and we will continue to make sure that the health system and the capacity of the system will be top of mind when we continue to announce new measures.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you can't do something based on the evidence if you claim you don't have the evidence, so once again I say: table the evidence. Albertans deserve it.

Quote: I am so worried about my dad; he's 96, and he would never survive COVID. That's an Albertan whose father is in long-term care where 10 residents have tested positive and two have died in the last two weeks. Mr. Speaker, while other provinces used the summer to hire and train staff and centralize a response, this Premier, this minister sat on their hands. Why did this government learn nothing, and when will they stand up and protect seniors in long-term care?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that is completely untrue. None of that is true. That member should be ashamed for saying the exact opposite of what we've done. We have actually given 170 million more dollars to our continuing care operators for them to be able to hire more, for them to be able to pay for the PPE that they need, for them to be able to comply with the public health measures and the infection prevention and control that's needed in their facilities. We will continue to make sure that we work with them to make sure they have the resources they need to protect their staff and their residents.

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

United States Energy Policies

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden and Vice-president-elect Kamala Harris. This was a victory for public service over self-interest, honesty over deceit, inclusion over racism, and unity over division. The right values won. However, we have work to do. The administration has signalled that it will advance a green energy initiative, and it will not proceed with KXL. What is this government doing to engage the White House on energy issues, and given the billions of Alberta dollars at stake will the Premier finally make the KXL deal public?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The KXL deal has been made public many times. The reality is that what you've seen in the last few days is that our government continues to work with the federal government to be able to communicate with President-elect Biden's office. We'll have more to say in the coming days. We're going to continue to fight for every pipeline, including Keystone, unlike that member, who, when she was Premier, protested against Energy East, protested against Keystone, protested against Northern Gateway. This government will

continue to fight for pipelines each and every day. That member should finally apologize to Albertans for her failure on that file.

Ms Notley: Well, what the member opposite said just there is factually absolutely, fundamentally untrue, and if it were said outside of this House, we'd be suing him.

I'm glad to hear, however, that somewhere deep in that government diplomacy is still an option. However, the Premier hasn't shown any. Last week he went on a far-right podcast and called the Governor of Michigan, quote, brain dead before declaring that, quote, resistance is futile. Yes, like the Borg from *Star Trek*. Does the Premier really think that attacking the co-chair of the President-elect's campaign team is a good move for the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are counting on him to protect our . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I see we hit a sore point with the Leader of the Official Opposition, who's very upset about having her record on pipelines pointed out. I'm happy to do it again. She protested against Energy East, protested against Northern Gateway. She said that she did not support Keystone though I will remind this House that this entire House voted unanimously to support moving forward with Keystone. But that member wants to hide the fact that she did nothing when it came to pipelines because she is against pipelines. We're not. It's that simple.

2:00

Ms Notley: That member is unprecedented for his willingness to come in here and say made-up things over and over.

But on the issue that Albertans care about, there's a very narrow window. If we're going to get the ear of the new administration, we have to convince them to take a more pragmatic approach to energy. This government must stop attacking those who are concerned about climate change and send a different signal instead. A sound first step would be to cancel the delayed, ineffective money pit that is the inquiry into un-Albertan activities and kill the embarrassing artifact, antiscience cartoon of a war room. When will the Premier stop burning bridges, start building them, and get rid of these wastes of money?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, May 2, 2015, on CBC radio the Opposition Leader, then Premier, said, "We're against it" when referring to Keystone, said that she's against it in 2015, and then she went on and ordered Alberta's representative in Washington, D.C., to abandon efforts to push for Keystone XL in the U.S. capital. That member is maybe ashamed now of her terrible record when it comes to pipelines, the fact that she abandoned our largest industry when she was the Premier and continues to do it. Her record on that file is complete and utter failure. We will not be lectured by her when it comes to this issue. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the call.

Corporate Taxation and Job Creation

Ms Phillips: Now, the UCP handed over \$4.7 billion to already profitable corporations right after being elected. The companies took that money and invested it elsewhere. The government said that it wouldn't cost \$4.7 billion even though it was right there on page 144 of last year's budget. Now, their top economic adviser, Jack Mintz, has quoted the figure and called it a substantial amount. Does the government agree with Mr. Jack Mintz that the cost of

their signature corporate handout is \$4.7 billion, and if not, do they believe that Mr. Mintz is incompetent?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The latest department estimates for the reduction in revenue for this government from our expedited job-creation tax cut is in the neighbourhood of \$250 million to \$400 million a year. Those are expert department estimates. If we want to take a look at a case study, we'd take a look at the members opposite when they were in government. When they increased business taxes by 20 per cent, they actually collected almost \$5 billion less over the subsequent years and chased out billions of dollars of investment from this province.

Ms Phillips: Well, now, the UCP has not produced any evidence that the \$4.7 billion in corporate handouts has created investments or jobs as promised. The claim was that the \$4.7 billion would attract investment, create 55,000 full-time jobs, but almost 50,000 full-time jobs were instead lost. We lost \$3 billion of investment; the economy got smaller. Will the government table the evidence that the \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway will deliver jobs, or will they continue to hide that evidence from Albertans?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, there is an abundance of research out there that demonstrates the correlation between a competitive business tax rate and investment attraction and job creation, but what is implicit in that question is the fact that the members opposite would have us push up business' taxes in this province by 50 per cent at a time of great economic challenge. I cannot imagine a more disastrous policy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The Leader of the Opposition has had lots of opportunity to ask questions. She'll have as much time as she would like when called upon by the Speaker, but right now it's the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: I'll tell you what's disastrous, Mr. Speaker. The most recent Auditor General's report that shows that the UCP fudged the books to the tune of \$1.6 billion worth of incompetence. This comes on top of a \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout, the worst performing economy in Canada. Meanwhile the UCP leader is Canada's least popular Premier. Will the government admit that their fiscal incompetence and failure to create jobs shows that they need to stop fudging the books and change their failed jobs policy, if not for the good of Albertans, who are looking for certainty, competence, employment, investment, then at least for their own political fortunes?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that question alone demonstrates the fiscal and financial illiteracy of the member opposite. This government, the Alberta government, received a clean audit opinion from the Auditor General. An auditor's role is to work with its client.

The Speaker: Order. Order. I had no problem hearing the question; I'm having significant difficulty hearing the answer. The minister will be heard.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An auditor's role is to work with its client, in this case the Alberta government, to work through complex reporting and accounting issues. These kinds of adjustments are not abnormal. We worked through the adjustments with the Auditor General, and we have a clean audit report.

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

Provincial Operations Centre

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are facing tough times right now. We've seen a collapse of energy prices, the worst economic contractions since the Dirty Thirties, and we still have the COVID-19 pandemic to contend with. We're also facing a \$24.2 billion deficit. That's why I was pleased to read recently that we are not building the new Provincial Operations Centre. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why are we not building this brand new facility?

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

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The previous government planned on spending \$122 million to construct a brand new building for the Provincial Operations Centre. Alberta's government already has a sizable amount of available real estate, so constructing a brand new building is not necessary, particularly in such challenging fiscal times. As such, the POC will be moved to the existing government-owned Muriel Stanley Venne building by the spring of 2021.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP wanted to spend \$122 million to construct a brand new Provincial Operations Centre and given that Alberta's government already has a large inventory of adequate buildings it can use and given that we're struggling with massive debt from the previous NDP government, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how much are we saving taxpayers by not building this facility brand new?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. We will save Albertans \$119 million dollars. I'm going to say that again. We will save \$119 million for the people of Alberta by relocating the current POC to the existing Muriel Stanley Venne building. Alberta's government will also spend approximately \$3 million to renovate the MSV building and move around 56 staff. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency anticipates an orderly transition to this new facility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her good fiscal stewardship here. Given that Albertans are facing challenging times and given that we are trying to find creative ways to save Alberta taxpayer dollars and given that we all will have another spare building with the Provincial Operations Centre now moving locations, once again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what happens to the old Provincial Operations Centre?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once the current POC moves to the MSV building in the spring of 2021, Alberta Infrastructure will initiate a process to surplus the property and eventually sell it. Operating costs will be reduced as we shut the building down. Once again, selling the building and cutting operating costs will be a further savings to Alberta taxpayers over and above the \$119 million that we're saving them this year. I want to see visibly local results in community after community across

this province. Finding ways to save Albertans money to pay down the debt is key for our future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Member Loyola: Once again this government is waiting until the last possible moment to take action on COVID-19, putting unfair pressure on struggling small businesses. Businesses need certainty, and they need support. That's why today the NDP Official Opposition proposed seven new measures to support businesses who are affected by the new restrictions. They include new grants, a reinstatement of the commercial eviction ban, and a 50 per cent cut on small-business insurance. To this minister: will you support all these measures to help ensure all of our small businesses survive?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly acknowledge the challenge that so many small businesses are going through during this time of economic uncertainty, and that's why very quickly we introduced a number of measures. We immediately deferred all WCB premiums until 2021. We're abating 50 per cent of the actual premium to small and medium-sized businesses, which is equivalent to \$350 million of support. We announced and have implemented the business relaunch grant for businesses that have been severely curtailed or had to shut down their business due to public health measures.

2:10

Member Loyola: Given that the new lockdown might be coming as this government fails to get a hold of this pandemic with proper testing, contact tracing, and self-isolation measures and given that the federal government has stepped up to the plate with a new lockdown support program to cover up to 25 per cent of small-business costs if they are forced to close because of COVID-19 and given that small businesses might not make it without additional support, through no fault of their own, to the same minister: will you join our call to match the incoming federal lockdown support program, up to 25 per cent, to help give Alberta small businesses a chance to make it to the other side of this pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question and highlighting the challenge that so many small businesses are facing today. Our Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation is working with business leaders to understand what might be needed in the future. They are developing some programming for those businesses that have had to curtail their operations due to the most recent public health announcements. We're continuing to monitor, and we are prepared to move with real action.

Member Loyola: Well, that sounds like a no.

Given that this government took some modest measures early in the pandemic by creating the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant and given that this government's poor management of the second wave is already driving down our consumer confidence and harming small businesses who are struggling to survive and given that small businesses need cash and they need certainty before things even get worse, to the same minister: will you join our call to triple the relaunch grant to help ensure that small businesses and

the hundreds of thousands of Albertans that they employ survive the second wave of this pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the business relaunch grant is available to Alberta businesses whose businesses were curtailed or shut down due to public health measures. That program remains in place. Our measures around Workers' Compensation Board premium relief remain in place for the current year, and we're continuing to monitor the need out there in the business community. We will be prepared to introduce additional programs as required.

COVID-19 Outbreaks in Seniors' Care Facilities

Ms Sigurdson: It's been six days since the media reported the horrifying COVID-19 outbreak at the South Terrace continuing care centre; 83 residents and 80 staff members have been infected, and 11 Albertans have died. The operator says that due to the collapse in staffing levels, residents won't be getting baths and some won't even get out of bed. This is unacceptable. What has the minister of seniors done in the past six days? Specifically, how many new staff has she brought in to the South Terrace? If she hasn't acted, how many more people will have to die before she will?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in constant contact with our continuing care operators, including that one in particular. We will continue to work with them and make sure they have all the resources that they need. I will highlight again – again – that we have provided \$170 million more to our continuing care operators for them to make sure that they have the workforce, that they have the resources, that they have the PPE to make sure that they are taking every precaution to be able to comply with public health guidance and infection prevention control measures as well as making sure they're doing everything they can to protect their staff and their residents.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that we urge the government to develop a provincial staffing strategy for continuing care, specifically to prevent the kind of tragedy we saw at McKenzie Towne in Calgary and now again at South Terrace in Edmonton, and given that case numbers are rising exponentially and there are outbreaks in dozens of seniors' facilities across Alberta and given that this government's failure to act earlier is costing lives today, will the minister finally produce a provincial staffing strategy for seniors?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that strategy actually was developed. It was developed by the continuing care operators themselves when they came to us in the spring and they asked for what eventually became the \$170 million more that we provided to them to be able to compensate them for the additional PPE that was needed, for the additional workforce that's needed, and for any other resources they needed to take care of their staff and their residents throughout the pandemic, knowing that this is going to be quite a long time for those operators and the staff and those residents in responding and living through this pandemic.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that McKenzie Towne and South Terrace have the same operator, Revera, and given that the largest and deadliest outbreaks in seniors' facilities in Alberta have all been privately operated, what is the minister doing to hold Revera

accountable for the staffing collapses and loss of life in the facility? What are you doing for Albertans you're supposed to speak up for? Do South Terrace families have to take Revera to court due to your failure to act, just like the McKenzie Towne families?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. I'll highlight again that Alberta has thankfully had one of the lowest, on a per capita basis, death rates in our continuing care facilities. Now, I mean, for those who have lost and for their families, my heart goes out to all of them. But we have AHS, who's the regulator of our continuing care operators. They continue to work with those operators throughout the pandemic, including when there are outbreaks, to make sure there are outbreak teams that come immediately to those facilities to make sure that the operators have all the resources they need, that they understand the protocols required to respond. They'll continue to do so at AHS.

Police Funding

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks we have seen discussions in many municipalities about defunding the police. These calls have stemmed largely from mass protests that began in the United States and now have been occupying time in council chambers across Alberta. As a government we've been working to add needed enforcement across Alberta. Considering that any defunding changes will have an impact on suburban and rural areas and that defunding of the police is something that some of the members across the way support, to the Minister of Justice: can you comment on your position of defunding police forces across Alberta?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Highwood. That is why it is completely shameful to see the members opposite cozying up to the defund-the-police radical activists. The government of Alberta rejects the idea that defunding the police is the solution to police reform. In my discussions with leaders from cultural and ethnic communities across our province the idea of defunding the police has never come up. We are listening to the very real and legitimate concerns of Albertans, and we will deliver tangible results to those communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Now, we know that the province provides funding to the municipalities for policing for the direct purpose of keeping our communities safe, and given that our government should never allow the municipalities to use that funding for just whatever they want, my question is again to the Minister of Justice: how much funding does the province provide to municipalities in the province for policing, in particular Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province provides two direct grants to our municipalities for police funding, the municipal policing assistance grant and the police officer grant. Added up, the province provides about \$90 million a year in these grants. For 2020-2021 this government has given \$26 million in policing grants to Edmonton and \$33 million to Calgary. These grants have been and remain fully funded under this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. As I mentioned, we know that the members opposite have stated their preference to defund the police, and we also know their disastrous record when it comes to ensuring Albertans' safety. Given that the minister has said that our government does not support defunding the police but, rather, modernizing and reforming the policing system, to the Minister of Justice: would provincial funding for policing still go to municipalities that defund their police forces?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is why I sent letters on this subject to our municipal leaders in September challenging them to not get caught up in the defund-the-police rhetoric. If municipal leaders are trying to rebalance their budgets to focus on core services, then that is something I welcome. [interjections] I can see that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is shouting. In my time as Minister of Municipal Affairs I encouraged municipal leaders to focus on core service delivery while finding efficiencies in other areas. Make no mistake, police is a core municipal service.

COVID-19 Cases in Schools

Ms Hoffman: Parents across Alberta say that they weren't told about COVID cases in their school for more than a week after their kids were exposed. These delays are putting students, staff, families, and communities at risk. The Premier talks about personal responsibility, but he's failed in his responsibility to give Albertans the information they need to be able to take care of their own kids. We knew a second wave would come, and the Minister of Education should have prepared. Why is she failing to provide timely notification of COVID when it's in our schools?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is a clear and effective process to respond to cases in schools. Parents are the first to know when there is a case in their school. We were one of the first provinces that began publicly tracking outbreaks in schools. The safety of students and school staff remains the Alberta government's number one priority throughout the school year.

2:20

Ms Hoffman: Given that the UCP failed to staff up the contact-tracing system even as cases surged and that AHS has eventually given up on contact tracing in schools and given that this crucial and time-consuming work has now fallen onto teachers and principals and given that some principals are trying to trace more than a dozen active cases in their school at one time while trying to keep their schools safe during this difficult time, does the minister understand yet that she could have protected students, staff, and families by capping class sizes at 15 instead of using Albertans' money to pay for a \$4.7 billion giveaway?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising to answer the complete fiction regarding our contact tracers. We started before the pandemic at 50. We are now at over 800. We are hiring more than 400 now, I think, in the coming days, as well as using – we started off throughout the spring. We received an offer from the federal government to use StatsCan employees to be able to help with contact tracing. We found out that their ability was best served to do the contact tracing for our schools. We're soon going to be getting to 125 of those StatsCan employees – thank you to the

federal government for providing those resources – to help with the contact tracing in our schools.

Ms Hoffman: Given that there are more than 6,000 Calgary Catholic students and staff forced into isolation and given that an entire school at Edmonton Catholic was forced to cancel in-person learning and given that Edmonton public is considering reaching out directly to Ottawa to appeal for the national tracing app, does the minister have any new resources, any new tools, anything new beyond talking points from August to repair contact tracing and notification in schools? The current system, Minister, all you ministers, is failing.

Mr. Shandro: None of that is true, Mr. Speaker. The complete opposite is the truth. We continue to invest in our contact tracers, and we've told AHS that they have all the resources they will need to be able to continue to hire, to continue to train the three levels of contact tracing that are going to be required. We will continue to use the employees of StatsCan to be able to provide that.

Now I'd ask the Member for Edmonton-Glenora why she used her time over the weekend in attending what might have been a superspreader event. We on this side are taking the pandemic much more seriously than those on the other side seem to be taking this pandemic.

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

Bill 47

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in the middle of a global health pandemic. We've seen workers in many, many different sectors going above and beyond to keep this province running during an incredibly stressful time while we're all dealing with COVID-19. Of course, on the last day we met in this House, the Minister of Labour and Immigration brought forward a bill that is an attack on workers in this province. Bill 47 removes protections for workers both for their safety at work and for compensation if they're injured on the job. Minister, I have looked, and I cannot find it. Can you please tell me specifically what in the bill improves safety for workers? All I'm seeing are rollbacks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, the minister of labour has spent a considerable amount of time talking about his bill inside this House. I do encourage that member to participate in that debate in the coming days inside this Chamber. But let me be clear. I'm proud of the minister of labour as he works to be able to undo some of the terrible things that the former NDP government did to employers inside this province. I know that you saw, Mr. Speaker, their entire time, that member when she was labour minister, their direct attack over and over on job creators inside this province. That ended 17 months ago, and I'm proud to say that we're getting Albertans back to work.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that this government seems to believe that Alberta workers don't deserve the same rights as other workers in Canada and given that the evidence is clear that the use of joint work-site health and safety committees improves safety and saves lives and given that no other jurisdiction in Canada exempts construction sites from having joint work-site health and safety committees and given that Bill 47 will do just that, to the same minister: why have you reduced the health and safety of workers on a construction site by ensuring that for many work sites there won't be a committee at all?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government took a different tone than the previous government did. We actually are here

supporting Alberta jobs and also supporting Alberta job creators. The opposite side was in government. They killed 180,000 jobs before COVID-19. They drove out over \$100 billion worth of investment. They laid waste to Alberta's economy. We're going the opposite direction of all that damage they did.

Ms Gray: Given that I just heard that the death or injury of a worker is just the price to be paid to create jobs in this province and given that that is usual for this crew – it's not about what's doing right; it's doing what UCP donors are asking for – and given that safety and reporting requirements on employers have been reduced and given that Albertans will be entitled to less if they're injured on the job and given that more accidents and deaths mean more claims through the WCB, to the same minister: why are you making it more likely for workers to be hurt and at the same time reducing the compensation they will receive?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I know they're embarrassed with their track record, but they don't need to make things up. Workers always have had and still have the right to refuse unsafe work. That has not changed. The members on the opposite side don't have any confidence in Alberta workers to do the right thing. They don't have confidence in Alberta employers to do the right thing. Our government will oversee those things, but we'll work with Albertans. They killed jobs. We're going to work with them to create jobs back. They lost a lot of them when they were in government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East is the only one with the call.

Opioid Addiction Treatment

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several years the addiction crisis has continued to increase its stranglehold on the people of our province. The pain and suffering caused place an enormous burden on friends, families, and neighbours in our communities. Albertans are out of work and struggling to put food on the table, and addiction is only making this more difficult for so many. To the minister: how will the transition towards a recovery-oriented system of care support Albertans in moving forward from their addiction into recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has the call.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The recovery-oriented system of care is a full continuum that includes prevention. It includes intervention, treatment, and recovery. We've made significant changes to get people into recovery by funding 4,000 addiction treatment spaces across the province. We're also constructing five recovery communities, that will add another 400 long-term treatment beds, a 30 per cent increase in capacity. We're focused on making sure that Albertans have the support that they need to get out of addiction and into recovery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that COVID-19 has put an additional strain on Albertans and given that public health measures meant to slow the spread of COVID-19 reduce access to services Albertans struggling with addiction rely on, Minister, how has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the care that people with addiction receive?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on Albertans who are struggling with and recovering from addiction. At the onset of the pandemic, public health measures meant to slow down the spread of COVID-19 led to reduced capacity in the residential treatment system. There were closures of mutual support groups. There was reduced access to AHS opioid dependency programs. All these services are essential in ensuring that Albertans who are struggling with addiction have access to needed recovery supports, and we must protect these moving forward.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that people struggling with addictions have traditionally faced financial hurdles in accessing residential treatment services and given that these financial barriers have prohibited people with addictions from accessing the life-saving care they need, Minister, how will the removal of user fees for publicly funded addiction treatment beds help people with addiction access the care they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the first time – the first time – in Alberta's history publicly funded addiction treatment will be extended to all Albertans. Previously, under the NDP, to receive residential addiction treatment in Alberta, you had to either be receiving Alberta supports or you had to pay for treatment privately. This cost prohibited many Albertans from accessing residential addiction treatment, including students, including senior citizens, including families. Recovery is for everyone, and now everyone – everyone – in this province can access the life-saving care that initiates recovery.

AISH Payment Schedule

Ms Renaud: Consistency and predictability: that's what the minister of social services claimed was behind her decision to change AISH payments. Well, now, thanks to the Auditor General we know that the real reason was because the minister wanted to cook her books, and she simply didn't care about the disabled Albertans that would be hurt by this senseless and cruel decision. Minister, you said that the change was for predictability; the AG said that it was so you could fudge your books. Who's telling the truth?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General determined that the department's accounting of AISH payments for the 2019-20 fiscal year was not in accordance with public-sector accounting standards. This is an accounting issue that resulted in the expenditure being reported in a different fiscal year from when it occurred. This issue has been rectified. Further, in his assessment of the department's action the Auditor General has been clear that the payment date did not affect the amount of benefit entitlement provided during the fiscal year.

2:30

Ms Renaud: Given that this minister was found by the Auditor General to have broken accounting rules with the date change and given that the minister was quick to claim that they've corrected the error and that the Auditor General confirmed, since this minister seems to suddenly care about addressing the problems she created, will she commit to reversing the change of payment dates, or is she still more concerned about the look of her bottom line than she is

about the lives and the well-being of disabled Albertans who have no recourse with this government?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, this government received a clean audit report on the financial statement, which indicates that the financial statements are presented fairly and accurately. The change in payment date by Community and Social Services has no bearing on whether there has been any untoward activity. That was simply a change that the minister chose to make, and the Auditor General weighed in and worked with us, the Alberta government, to determine appropriate treatment. None of this is out of the ordinary.

Ms Renaud: Given that this minister has the audacity to claim that there has been no impact on AISH recipients and given that I've heard from Albertans to whom this date change has meant everything – it means NSF charges, it means eviction notices, it means no food, it means the inability to buy a bus pass, it means a lot, and it means stress – this government needs to stand up and apologize for what they've done and then put the dates back to where they were so people have room until the end of the month.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, the actual amount of cash provided to AISH clients receiving those payments did not change. We do recognize that any change is difficult. Community and Social Services caseworkers did their best to work with clients and ensure that they received appropriate notice. Prior to the change, many AISH clients would seek advice monthly as to when the payment was going to be issued. Now it is far more predictable. In fact, the Ministry of Community and Social Services has actually seen a decline in the number of AISH clients contacting their caseworkers to ask for emergency benefits this year.

Government Policies

Mr. Nielsen: It's been my honour to represent the people of Edmonton-Decore since 2015. It is my sworn duty to represent the issues of my constituents. This government's actions are detrimental and destructive to their lives. Recently a constituent, Natasha, e-mailed me stating, quote: privatized health care will ruin our province. To the Minister of Health: will you listen to my constituents and stop your move to American-style health care? If not, please explain to Natasha why you don't care about her concerns.

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. There's nothing Americanized about what we're doing. We're doing, actually, quite frankly, exactly what the NDP did. Throughout their four years they had contracted out laundry. They had contracted out labs. We're proceeding with exactly the same type of proposals as the NDP did. I'll even note that when the performance review of AHS was released in the early part of this year, it was lauded, actually, by the Health critic of the NDP for its common-sense proposals. We're going to continue to work with AHS to make sure that they're a high-performing entity. We've asked them to very slowly and carefully throughout the pandemic proceed with only a portion of their proposals.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that I also received an e-mail from one of my constituents, Dylan, stating that right-to-work legislation, quote,

will negatively affect all Albertans but especially men and women like me that are proud to work union and fight for fair wages and benefits for our hard work and given that the UCP recently at their party AGM voted in favour of right-to-work policies and that no UCP MLA is willing to answer a question on right to work, to the Minister of Labour: here and now will you listen to the people and commit to not legislating right to work in Alberta? My constituents are listening.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate that the hon. member is quite interested in what happens at the UCP policy convention. Maybe next year he'll buy himself a ticket. He's welcome to come. I know that he had me at his convention once. They kept us wrapped around in ropes and wouldn't let us go anywhere, but we'll let him go around our convention and enjoy the process. The reality is, though, that that party does their business; our government does our business. We're focused right now on doing the work of Albertans to get them back to work. We're focused on pipelines. I'd like to close with that. That hon. member's party is antipipeline, so is he antipipeline, too? Yes or no?

Mr. Nielsen: Well, given that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the economy and that small business and families are feeling the pinch like a Vise-Grip and given that banks require current appraisals for mortgage renewals even though the pandemic has cut some property values by more than half, as I've heard from my constituents, and given that one of my constituents, Arnett, stated that, quote, Canadians need to get through this tough time, that only government can help them survive, that otherwise many would go bankrupt and lose their life savings, what action has this government taken to protect small businesses and homeowners? You have the power to help these people, so when will you?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite for highlighting the challenges to current small-business owners. We recognize that many are facing challenges because of the global pandemic and the largest collapse in the global economy since the Great Depression. We have introduced a small and medium-sized businesses relaunch grant. We have provided corporate income tax deferrals. We have provided a Workers' Compensation Board deferral and premium abatement. We have frozen education and property taxes. We have offered ATB loan deferrals. We have offered utility payment deferrals and abated the tourism levy.

Speaker's Ruling Supplementary Questions

The Speaker: I'll just provide some comment to the Member for Edmonton-Decore. While I appreciate the fact that he endeavoured to make the link between the first question and the third question, somehow representing his constituents, which I know he does a valiant effort of, the rules of the Assembly are such that the first question and the supplemental question should have some link other than the fact that it is our job to represent our constituents.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Provincial Chief Firearms Officer

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans elected this government, they wanted to get a fair deal from Ottawa. That is why

we implemented a Fair Deal Panel this year, that gave its report to the government earlier this year. The report came back with 25 recommendations, the 15th one being that they should appoint an Alberta chief firearms officer, or CFO. This Alberta-appointed CFO is desperately needed given that many Albertans are upset with the federal government gun ban. To the Minister of Justice: given that the report was released in June of this year, can we expect an Alberta-appointed CFO?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that very important question. Alberta's government is committed to protecting the constitutional rights of all Albertans from the federal government's overreach. That's why I'm very pleased to report that the chief firearms office implementation team is hard at work setting up a provincial CFO office. That office needs to be operational before looking to appoint a chief firearms officer, and we can see the good work done by the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat to inform the role and responsibilities of the chief firearms officer.

The Speaker: The Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that all too often the federal government takes to blaming law-abiding gun owners as criminals and given that this often leads to the creation of more paperwork, costs, headaches, and delays for lawful Alberta hunters, farmers, and sport shooters and given that the chief firearms officer is responsible for licensing, transferring, authorizations, and other day-to-day administration of the Firearms Act, to the minister: can you please tell us how an Alberta chief firearms officer would be able to make life easier for law-abiding Alberta firearms owners?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member once again for that important question. A provincial chief firearms officer may have discretion in how they apply programs and rules laid down by Ottawa. Our hope is that they would show sensitivity to the unique cultures of our communities in doing so. The implementation team will examine new policies that are fully focused on the illegal use of firearms. A good example is the planned switch to a made-in-Alberta ballistics analysis process. Right now there is an eight-month wait for results from the RCMP lab, and we are working so hard to protect those rights.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that an Alberta chief firearms officer would administer regulation of Alberta firearms businesses and given that firearms businesses are key partners in firearms safety and education and given that firearms businesses are also partners in combating the illegal firearms trade, working with law enforcement to stop practices like straw purchasing, to the minister: how might an Alberta chief firearms officer work with the firearms businesses to promote safety and education and work with law enforcement to keep guns out of the hands of criminals?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An Alberta chief firearms officer will focus on problems and solutions, not attacking lawful gun owners. Despite our disagreement with the federal government, we will work with them to eliminate the practice of straw purchases, whereby an individual will legally purchase firearms to then

illegally sell them. An Alberta chief firearms officer would work with private business partners to develop systems for flagging these types of purchases to protect lawful gun owners in this province.

2:40

Local Business

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has recently made a social media post, that all Albertans should agree with, to support local businesses. Local businesses are the backbone of the economy and the heart of our communities. I know that supporting local means that we are supporting our communities, and as the Premier had mentioned, local businesses such as traditional bookstores are struggling to survive now more than ever. To the Minister of Finance: are there supports for local businesses such as bookstores, which are struggling?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Local businesses are truly critical to the health and well-being of our local communities. In fact, small businesses make up 95 per cent of all businesses in Alberta and employ nearly half a million people. That's why we've implemented a number of measures to assist small businesses such as abating one-half of the premiums for small and medium-sized businesses relative to their WCB obligations. We've also introduced the small and medium-sized business enterprise relaunch grant. We participated in the commercial rent assistance program and the tourism levy abatement.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Given that farmers' markets are a popular agritourism attraction as well as a great opportunity for farmers and local producers to be able to sell locally and given that we need to be able to support farmers' markets and local farmers as the total estimated market value was \$924 million in 2016 and given that due to COVID-19 the trend for one-stop shopping has created barriers for farmers and local producers to be able to sell at markets, to the minister of agriculture: how can we support local farmers' markets?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government recognizes the importance of farmers' markets to both the agriculture sector and to Albertans. That is why at the outset of the pandemic we declared farmers' markets as an essential service, and we continue to look for ways to support them in the coming months. We will be consulting with farmers' markets to see how we as a government can get out of their way. The pandemic has shown us how important local sources can be. That is why we are committed to working with farmers' markets to ensure that Albertans have greater access to high-quality local products.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that supporting local businesses also means supporting our local artists in Alberta and given that many of them have lost audiences and income because of the COVID-19 pandemic and given that the work artists do enriches our lives, promotes creativity and innovation, which contributes to a more diversified economy, to the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women: how is the government supporting local artists?

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

Mr. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When arts thrive in our province, it is a better place to live, invest, and do business. To help artists through this difficult time, Alberta's government invested \$150,000 in the Alberta Spotlight Online Concert Series as well as \$300,000 in Alberta Culture Days. These grants actually supported events and paid artists to work. The ministry has also created the Pivot Online tool kit. This helps keep artists and their artwork and patrons moving forward, and it also helps to ensure the viability of this incredible industry. These supports help foster community spirit, celebrate Alberta's unique culture, and provide paid opportunities for local artists.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

In 30 seconds or less we will return to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has a statement.

Economic Diversification

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a very important conversation happening in our province right now, and it's not the pandemic; it's the importance of diversification. The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation recently wrote an article that talked about just this. This word has been thrown around a lot, but it's one that's a key pillar in our recovery. This conversation should be nonpartisan. What does the future of Alberta's economy look like?

Mr. Speaker, some people seem to miss the point of diversification of our economy; that is, they think it's an "or" conversation. It is an "and" conversation. Alberta can still have a diversified economy and a strong energy sector. It is not about oil and gas or technology; it's about oil and gas and technology. Geothermal power, hydrogen technology, petroleum, plastic recycling: examples are everywhere. We currently have companies that are 3-D printing pipeline components and ventilators for AHS. A company in Highwood has created unique modular data centres for oil and gas companies to store data. Suncor has a partnership with Microsoft in the usage of artificial intelligence, and Imperial Oil has been a partner of the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute.

Mr. Speaker, diversification will not happen overnight, and it will not kill our energy sector. Albertans have never stood down from a challenge. Diversification will be difficult, but we can do it, and we are doing it now. Albertans have been embracing this for a long time, and it's time that both sides of this House see reason to embrace it as well. This cannot continue to be "or the other" conversation; rather, it must be "and another" conversation.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for recognizing me. As chair of the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee I am pleased to present the required copies of the committee's final report in relation to its review of citizens' initiatives and recall pursuant to Government Motion 25. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow committee members from both sides of the Assembly for their work over the past four months, and I

would also like to acknowledge the support and expertise provided by staff from the Legislative Assembly Office, the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, Elections Alberta, and so many more that can't even make this list because so many people put their input into this committee. Thank you to them. I do have the copies of the report right here.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 48

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2)

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2).

Bill 48 comes at a time when Alberta needs assurance about our support for the economy. Like all red tape reduction initiatives, this bill works towards making Alberta one of the freest, fastest moving economies in North America.

I hereby move first reading of Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2).

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table Alberta's first-ever red tape reduction report. It shows that we have cut 51,000 regulatory hoops and saved Albertans \$476 million in compliance costs.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there other tablings?

Seeing none, I have a tabling this afternoon. Pursuant to section 33(1) of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act I have here the requisite six copies of the Public Interest Commissioner's seventh annual report for the period of April 1, 2019, through March 31, 2020.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mrs. Aheer, Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2019-20 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 204

Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise at third reading of my private member's bill, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

As the sponsor of this bill I have to tell you that I really wish I'd thought of a wittier name for it, perhaps Promoting Plasma

Research and Development in the North or Diversifying Alberta's Economy or An Act to Secure Canada's Pharmaceutical Needs in the 21st Century. Regardless, I'm pleased to see the progress the Assembly has made on this crucial piece of legislation.

2:50

The legislation simply repeals a very partisan and one-dimensional Bill 3 from 2017, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. That bill gave only Canadian Blood Services the ability to compensate donors for their plasma. This inhibited biopharmaceutical companies from accessing Canadians' plasma, which they need to create new breakthroughs in medicinal treatments. The problem is that there is a world-wide shortage of plasma, with only five of 195 nations allowing for compensation of plasma donors and thus providing the world with most of the available plasma products.

Fortunately, here in Canada we're rich, and we're the second-highest purchaser per capita of these products, only behind the United States, and we purchase these products from these biopharmaceutical companies, acquired from foreign nations like Germany and the United States. The hypocrisy of the original blood donations act is that the arguments were about supposed atrocities that happen in these countries in order to collect plasma, yet at the same time there was an acceptance from the government of the time that it was okay to purchase these medicinal products from these very same countries which are collected in these alleged unethical manners. Pure hypocrisy, and it's disappointing.

What is plasma, Madam Speaker? Plasma is the amber liquid that makes up about 55 per cent of our blood volume and carries blood cells, clotting factors, proteins, antibodies, and much more. Plasma fractionation is the biomedical approach employed to make life-saving plasma products. These plasma products have wide-ranging clinical applications, from treating hemophilia to burns and immune deficiency.

In Canada Canadian Blood Services procures blood and plasma from volunteers, and that is a product that is used in our emergency rooms, our operating theatres, and our surgical suites. The plasma that people give to these biotech companies is fractionated, screened, purified, and then manufactures more life-saving therapies. For instance, the products may have more albumin to treat burn and trauma patients or more immunoglobulins for those who have immune deficiency disorders or more clotting factors for people with bleeding disorders.

Again, over 90 per cent of the world's supply of plasma comes from the United States, Germany, Austria, Czechia, and Hungary as these are the only nations in the world that allow for compensation to individuals for their plasma. About 50,000 Canadians rely on these plasma-based products, 8,000 in Alberta alone. We spend about \$150 million annually provincially on these products. In 2019 there was a world supply shortage of these life-saving therapies, which resulted in many hardships for many of these Canadians. This year, the year of COVID, we have learned that international supply lines can be jeopardized, and we experienced shortages in things like masks and ventilators and other vital supplies. If there's one thing that we can learn from this most recent pandemic, it's that nations like ours need to be more self-resilient. We need to be less dependent on foreign countries for this equipment, for these supplies, for these medications.

Admittedly, there's been, you know, some unfortunate opposition, including from Canadian Blood Services, which is disappointing because the CEO of said company spoke very highly about these other plasma agencies in 2013, when he wrote an editorial that supported the need for companies other than Canadian

Blood Services to have access to plasma so that they can make these medications.

When I look at the resistance, they probably think that I'm on the Fair Deal Panel – and this is my only conclusion – and that I might look at them in that fair deal perspective, and they're right. See, what I found out is that even Canadian Blood Services, when we met with them, admitted that they're substantially more expensive than their so-called competitors, if you will. You know, out of 4,000 employees they have over 650 individuals who are on the sunshine list. That's a substantial number of people in this organization that make a very good dollar. It's disappointing that they don't purchase plasma from these companies that do get it from Canadians as they're getting the plasma from Canadians. These companies are collecting it in an ethical manner. Again, it's unfortunate that CBS chooses not to purchase from these local agencies.

You know, as a member of the Fair Deal Panel, when I looked into the disparities in our relationship within Confederation, we found that there was a centralization of power within the Laurentian elites, who support Ottawa-centric agencies. CBS is a group just like that. They are an organization that is managed from Ottawa, with its tendrils in other provinces.

I guess the question is: could they be replaced? Could Alberta Health Services do the role of Canadian Blood Services within Alberta? The answer is yes, with some investment, of course. Now here's a good one: could pharmacists procure and distribute the plasma-based medications instead of Canadian Blood Services? The answer is yes. Why? Because they're classified as medications and pharmacists have the ability. They just have to make sure they have the right equipment, like refrigeration and whatnot. Could Alberta save money by doing this instead of CBS? If there's one thing we learned within the Fair Deal Panel, it's that if we're going to pay the salaries, why aren't we paying the salaries to Albertans instead of someone in Ottawa or groups in Ottawa?

You know, I guess the one thing that I've learned from CBS, other than their desire of self-preservation – and I have to be clear on this, that a virtual monopoly of Canadian Blood Services does not guarantee a secure supply of plasma products in Canada. We have over 20 years' experience in this, almost 25, where they have been unable to meet the needs of Canada, never mind the world. The number continues to drop as more medications, more developments in plasma research are being achieved.

You know, it is important to look at why we are in this debate. Albertans are reliant on the plasma-based medications and therapies to maintain their health so that they can carry on with their lives. These people have immune deficiency issues, blood disorders, and other wildly unique conditions. You see, these people have such rare conditions that in order to be heard, they had to join big umbrella groups like the Network of Rare Blood Disorder Organizations or the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization. Unfortunately, the opposition chose not to consult with any of these groups despite receiving letters.

To that effect, I do need to take this time to speak on behalf of the Canadian Hemophilia Society. A member from across the way, specifically the Member for Lethbridge-West, quoted that the Canadian Hemophilia Society is against my private member's bill. I have some great news. They've written to me – they've also written the Member for Lethbridge-West – that they have concerns about her comments because they do not reflect the national organization. They have identified that the B.C. chapter is an outlier. Thus, the relationship with the rest of the group has been severed. That is the group that perhaps the Member for Lethbridge-West should be indicating specifically. Again, not only do the Canadian Hemophilia Society's members support my private member's bill, but so do their relevant related agencies from around

the world. That is good to hear, that they're open minded in ensuring that. I hope the member from across the way will apologize to them and get on record that she misspoke on their behalf.

Now, I understand that you wrote to *Hansard* and said that they need to change that, but I don't know if *Hansard* can do that sort of thing, so I'm curious to see what comes out of that. Again, that's unfortunate, that such a distortion of facts was provided. That is unfortunate.

With that, though, Madam Speaker, I certainly urge all Members of the Legislative Assembly, regardless of which side of the House you sit on, to support this bill because at the end of this day this is a nonpartisan bill, and its focus is the health and well-being of all individuals.

I move third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has moved third reading of Bill 204, Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. Does the Assembly agree to the motion for third reading? [interjections] My sincere apologies. We're going to have a debate on third reading of this bill, as we do in this Chamber. I am wondering if there are any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

3:00

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to third reading of Bill 204, Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. I think, you know, I'm just going to piggyback a little bit on what the member just finished saying as he was talking about some of the previous debate that we've had related to the private member's bill, about the Member for Lethbridge-West. You know, her statements were not actually interpreted correctly by the member. There was an error in which group she was talking about, and I believe that's been corrected.

What else is on *Hansard*, Madam Speaker? Interestingly enough, while we're on this subject and although it doesn't specifically have to do with blood or plasma products in this particular piece of legislation, it seems to me that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo last week or the week before the constituency break claimed that labour groups aspire to be "a country that has been criticized for harvesting organs from prisoners for their population." I think that perhaps the member needs to sit and think about pointing his fingers at other people.

In any event, I'm going to move on to Bill 204. I think that it's important to clarify that we actually do support increasing the blood supply in Alberta so that patients are healthy. That's a pretty straightforward statement. I think we all agree. This piece of legislation will not do that. Bill 204 will decrease the blood supply for Albertans and Canadians, allowing international companies to come to Alberta and export blood, and will decrease control for Canadian Blood Services on that supply of blood.

Now, I know the member went on and on earlier talking about – I think he just essentially reorganized the way health services are delivered in Alberta within, like, two minutes. He figures, you know: "They can do this? Yes. Let's give it to that. Yeah, we got there. Yes. Let's do that." Well, things don't operate that way, Madam Speaker. These are very complex issues. These are very serious issues with implications for people that need these products, for people that donate blood, for people that are involved in the delivery of health services, and I think that for the member to stand up and wave away their importance because he doesn't think it's important is incredibly disrespectful.

It's also unfathomable to me that during a pandemic, instead of focusing on the enormous challenges ahead of us and that are in front of us, that I think we all are becoming increasingly aware of, the UCP's focus is on continuing to privatize different aspects of the health care system. That is unfortunate.

You know, I said this the last time, I think, when I spoke at second reading of this particular piece of legislation. I said then that the safety of Albertans, in my opinion, is more important than the interests of international pharmaceutical companies. Now, I believe that after I said that during the second stage of debate on this particular piece of legislation, a UCP backbencher stood up and, I think, was inferring that I was talking about big-pharma conspiracy theories of some kind when, in fact, what we've been talking about are large multinational corporations. I'm not saying that the work they do is bad. What I am saying is that they are motivated and driven by different things than, say, Canadian Blood Services or nonprofit services or government services, for that case.

Again, this is perhaps my opinion, but I don't believe that a backbencher in the UCP should be reforming Alberta's blood system when Canadian Blood Services, who are the experts – let's be clear about that; this member is not – opposes this plan. I certainly look forward to hearing the member's additional views on that and why he believes that, you know, he has done all of the consultation and work, that he can stack up his evidence against an organization with a history like Canadian Blood Services.

That being said, the existing legislation: essentially, what this piece of legislation does is simply repeal. That particular piece of legislation has only been in place for a very short time. As I said during the second stage of debate, we've not had an opportunity actually to see the impact of that legislation. Simply to eliminate, to repeal, to get rid of it before we have accurate data or evidence to show that it is working or it is not working – you know, the UCP or this private member certainly seems in a big hurry to repeal, to replace it. I'm not entirely sure what his vision is, based on his speech a little earlier, but I would suggest that perhaps it's time to slow down and further consult and further look at the evidence as opposed to the ideology that seems to be driving this member.

We know that Bill 204 is indeed very brief, and all it does is repeal the 2017 Voluntary Blood Donations Act and authorize cabinet to make transitional regulations arising from repeal of the 2017 act. The 2017 Voluntary Blood Donations Act bans the purchase of blood and advertising for the purchase of blood. Actually, I thought that was a really great move. I remember not all of that debate at the time, but a lot of the debate at the time focused on – and certainly we recognized that as Canadians we are not sustaining our own supply. We talked a lot about some of the reasons why that was and that this particular piece of legislation would help guide that process and encourage us to become more sustainable in this area. Again, as I said earlier, this piece of legislation simply repeals and ignores any progress or doesn't even allow the progress to continue so that we could actually get an accurate measure of what has happened and what has changed.

I think it was actually quite interesting. Now, I'm not on that committee that had an opportunity to have a look at this private member's bill, but for anyone interested, *Hansard* is available, and people can have a look at what some of the stakeholders that were present had to say at that committee. I think that certainly their expertise was appreciated, and some of their comments were really important. I'm just going to review a couple of the stakeholders. Canadian Blood Services, who sent Dr. Sher to the committee, said that this bill shouldn't pass and that they actually couldn't remain neutral on this. Although it's not huge, I think that if you look at the history of Canadian Blood Services, you can see that this is not something that they take lightly and that to speak out publicly about

a piece of legislation this strongly is not something that they do frequently, so I think that sends a message. They are rarely this blunt. They are rarely as blunt as they were at committee on the piece of legislation, and they were very clear when they said that there were some serious flaws in this legislation.

Again, I'm reminded, Madam Speaker, that, you know, this is not the first private member from that side of the House that has had an opportunity to bring their private member's bill here. Although I do appreciate that a committee was able to host different stakeholders to get their input, I would like to say that not all private members in this place are afforded the same opportunity. Weirdly enough, it seems that most NDP or most private members' bills from this side don't ever see the light of day. Coincidence? Who knows? It doesn't seem very fair, does it?

I don't believe a backbencher should be trying to ram his piece of legislation through if it's something that Canadian Blood Services has serious concerns about. So serious are their concerns that they showed up in a committee and said so.

I haven't heard an answer from – well, certainly, the minister hasn't spoken when I've been in the Chamber to hear it, and I haven't heard it from the private member. But is the Minister of Health – and this is a question we should ask ourselves – truly in support of this piece of legislation? I recognize that the Minister of Health has a rough history of consulting, but does he actually think this is a good idea?

BloodWatch, who is another stakeholder, the sponsor, actually, of Bill 204: now, they've been called, you know, a number of different names, but I think they were even confused. I believe this was the group that was even confused about whether or not this piece of legislation included blood and plasma products. So if the stakeholders that were invited to make presentations to a committee tasked with reviewing the private member's bill were confused and didn't understand, I would suggest that that would give sufficient . . .

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 204 in third reading? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an absolute honour to rise to speak to this bill and also because of the member who is sponsoring it. I can think of no one better to sponsor this bill than a former front-line health care worker, someone who is a professional expert, an absolute hero in this field, to have them step forward and sponsor this bill, Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act.

I just can't wrap my head around why this has become seemingly, in this House, palpably controversial among the 87 members, not on the government side but, it seems, Madam Speaker – always through you to everyone – on the opposition side of this House.

Now, this is a member who has committed his career to public service, first on the front lines as a paramedic, I believe, and then, as well, as the terrific MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I have such immense respect for him, his character, his conviction, and his commitment to do the best for his constituents and Albertans. Another reason I'm passionate about this bill and supporting this great member sponsoring this incredible bill: we share many linkages, including our family linkages. We both have Japanese family members, he, of course, sharing Japanese ancestry. I look forward, once we're through the pandemic, for myself and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to get our Japanese families together for tea.

With that, today I rise, Madam Speaker, in support of Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. I would again like to thank my colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for bringing forward a very important piece of legislation impacting the plasma supply for Albertan and Canadian patients. This, again, should not be controversial. It is the responsibility of government to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens. This ranges from making sure that drivers who are on the road know what they are doing to indeed monitoring our health system to ensure that Canadians and Albertans have access to enough vital and life-saving medical supplies.

In 2017 the NDP passed Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. This bill had a direct impact on the options for plasma collection in Alberta. The Voluntary Blood Donations Act banned everyone except for Canadian Blood Services from compensating plasma donations, a monopoly. Go figure, Madam Speaker. Looking at the numbers, Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec account for only 16.7 per cent of the plasma required to meet the demands of Canadians. Only 16.7 per cent. The rest is imported from international sources, including the United States – and we know what the opposition thinks of the United States; everything that's Americanized is always a negative connotation with their ideology, that's so rife with anti-Americanism – a nation that pays donors. The issue with this is that if there is a disruption to the supply, both in America and globally, Canadian patients will be left in a vulnerable position.

I understand where the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is going on this, Madam Speaker. It is important to note that no country in Europe or North America has met their own domestic demand through solely uncompensated donations. When we allow for compensated donations, not only are we able to increase Canadian plasma products in the global supply chain, but we are also able to do so more efficiently. Increase capacity here at home; reduce capacity including the American supply: you'd think that everyone in this House, when they consider that anything Americanized means negative, would support this. Now, why is this important? Why is it important that we have a stable plasma supply both domestically and globally? The answer is simple: because it saves lives.

Madam Speaker, the most valuable thing we have is life itself. Plasma is used to treat trauma, burn, and shock patients as some of the components help with blood clotting. Moreover, leukemia and other cancer patients may receive multiple plasma transfusions in the course of their treatments. If the plasma supply line is interrupted, we are putting the lives of many at risk. This is why patient groups support – again, patient groups support – Bill 204 and advocate for measures to increase the reliability of supply for their life-saving therapies. Again, this is patient centred. John Boyle, the president of the Immune Deficiency Foundation, stated that, quote, recognizing plasma donors for the heroes they are and to educate the public on the need for more donations is important. End quote.

We cannot continue with the status quo because it hasn't been working. By compensating donors, we are creating an additional incentive that will lead more individuals to give their plasma. This is something, through you, Madam Speaker, the NDP opposition can learn so much from. So much of life, including creating the best system, in this case plasma blood delivery, is based on incentives. You need to create the right incentive structure, and I think compensating donors will do that.

The Immune Deficiency Foundation are not the only ones that voiced strong support for Bill 204. The Network of Rare Blood Disorder Organizations, or NRBDO, is a pan-Canadian coalition of not-for-profit organizations that represent individuals with rare

blood disorders and people with chronic conditions. I would like to share a quote from the NRBDO.

It is the position of the NRBDO that with no evidence of safety risks, and no evidence of threats to the voluntary collection of blood, compensated collection of plasma can help with the global and Canadian plasma supply shortage, helping . . . patients . . . access plasma-derived [medical] products when they need them.

Compensating for plasma would not threaten Canada's strong voluntary whole-blood collection system, Madam Speaker. Now, as we've been having this debate, I know that critics may try and claim that there is a potential of transmitted diseases through plasma products when we are incentivizing donation. However, there have been no – I want to repeat in *Hansard*: however, there have been no – confirmed cases of hepatitis, HIV transmitted through plasma-derived products in over two decades, and the screening process remains absolutely thorough. While this process must be regulated to ensure the safety of everyone involved, the government should not be limiting Alberta's ability to pursue an untapped market simply because of ill-founded concerns, truly ill-founded concerns, over public safety.

Now, according to Dr. Peter Jaworski, a Canadian professor teaching at Georgetown University, global demand for plasma will increase by 6 to 10 per cent roughly each year for the foreseeable future, with numbers only expected to increase even more with an immense reliance on nonremunerated blood donations already. With a mere 5 per cent of the world's population responsible for more than half of all plasma – wow; that is quite a statistic, Madam Speaker – collected globally, shortages will continue to occur, running up health care costs and leaving our patients vulnerable to supply disruptions. Dr. Jaworski argues that relying predominantly on five countries, just five countries, so Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and – wait for it; oh, this one might get the House all riled up on the opposition side – the United States, that we can't rely on the United States, for the world's total plasma supply is what inflates cost and sabotages those who need access immediately.

These are the facts, and quite frankly, Madam Speaker, they cannot be ignored. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo knows that, as does everyone on the government side. I hope that the opposition, through you, will hear this. These are facts, and they cannot be ignored.

Thank you.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in debate once again on Bill 204, put forward by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. The bill is pretty brief. It simply repeals the 2017 Voluntary Blood Donations Act. I've been interested in listening to debate this afternoon, particularly to some of the comments made by members opposite, from the government side, talking about their vision.

The dichotomy that we see in this House quite often is, once again, very clear in terms of how the government seems to think that anything that is a publicly motivated plan is somehow wrong and that if something seems to be in need of revision or support, then it should be handed over to the private sector. That's the be-all and end-all that seems to be in the minds of the government members. Once again, it's the type of thinking that we see here in Bill 204. The 2017 Voluntary Blood Donations Act banned the purchase of blood and banned advertising for the purchase of blood. It provided exemptions for Canadian Blood Services and for research purposes and for persons specified by regulation.

Now, Madam Speaker, many members of this House, if they are able to, donate blood on a regular basis, myself included, probably not every 56 days as one is capable of doing as a male, a little bit longer for females – I think I've donated about 38 times – but that doesn't mean that that system is a failure. It means that it needs to be supported, and that is what Bill 204 is attacking, the support that was given through the 2017 Voluntary Blood Donations Act, which banned the purchase of blood. One of the things that one should be asking is: who, in fact, sells their blood? Where are the donors coming from in countries which supply so much of the plasma world-wide? Well, of course, in previous debate we've heard that it's marginalized people who are selling their blood, so it's a rather exploitative system where marginalized people will use the sale of their own blood as a means of raising revenue to support themselves. You can see evidence of this in border communities in Texas, bordering Mexico, where you see large volumes of blood donors coming from across the Mexican border.

Of the stable, efficient supply of plasma, as mentioned by members opposite in recent debate today, I ask: stable and efficient for whom? As also mentioned by members of the government, opposite, they suggested that it was the government's responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens. Now, is that accomplished, I ask, by exporting plasma to Germany to supply a Chinese-owned fractionation company? That's exactly what happens, Madam Speaker, with the blood that is generated and would be generated by this particular change allowing private, paid donations. That blood would end up going overseas to supply a Germany-located fractionation company which is owned by a Chinese multinational.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, the issue in looking at our plasma supply line is not that the public system has failed; it's just not been supported properly. As I mentioned in debate earlier, one of the things that we should be doing in this country as far as our curriculum is concerned is to talk about the responsibility of our citizens to supply that plasma to each other. Now, the United Conservative Party government's logic is to incentivize everything with dollars, with money. In other words, people should be prodded and bribed into supplying plasma by paying for it, by compensating them, rather than considering it as a public duty or a collective responsibility.

That's the way that I believe our blood collection system should operate. If, indeed, the Canadian public was as aware as they should be, they would be much more inclined to satisfy the need for Canadian plasma. The members opposite, in the government side, suggest that that would never happen, that because globally the suppliers of plasma are, by and large, paid sources, that's the only way it will ever work. Well, I contest that notion, Madam Speaker. To condemn the public donor collection system simply because there are some issues with it and because it needs work and it needs a greater level of awareness is the wrong way to go, but it's the way that the government side always seems to go with respect to our health care.

I wonder what's next as far as the incentivization of the Canadian public and our health care system. Should we, with respect to our current pandemic, as a matter of getting people to wear masks, pay them a dollar a day to wear a mask? Is that the way that we should get people to look at the value of protecting each other in our health care system, or should we rely upon our sense of collective responsibility and duty to one another as members of the public? Should we perhaps pay somebody 50 bucks a day to isolate if they've, you know, come into contact with somebody who's got COVID-19? Is that what we should do to encourage a responsible reaction to a public pandemic that we face right now?

That's the type of logic that one would follow if indeed you've carried it through from the reliance upon the incentivization by dollars, by money that the UCP seems to think is the only way we can get Canadians to provide enough plasma for their own uses as well as perhaps to supply an export market. Simply because the paid market, the compensated market, is what supplies most of the world most of the product right now does not mean that that is the only way it could work.

There are other means and other options, and I suggest that the public system of collections and the donation of your own plasma is something that is necessary in this country for the long-term safety of supply of our own plasma. The concerns over public safety are something that everybody wants to address, but right now, of course, we do need more public donations. We're not meeting the demand, but I don't think Canadians are aware of it. You know, if we indeed instilled in folks at an early age, as a public duty, the need to donate blood on a regular basis, we would more than satisfy our needs, and the need to compensate or incentivize individuals by paying them to donate blood would not be there.

I hesitate to think what would be next on the list for the government members to support in terms of incentivizing public safety, public health measures, particularly in the time that we live in right now with respect to COVID-19. If indeed you want to have somebody isolate in your house, would you pay for them? Would there be a subsidy to a landlord who would get together a COVID-19 house? What other means of paying people would you investigate for protecting one another as a matter of incentivizing them, you know, as I mentioned, wearing masks? I shudder to think where the UCP would go down that road.

The supply chain is something that we really need to think about, Madam Speaker, when it comes to plasma, especially now, in a time of pandemic that we face, where numbers are rising exponentially, and here we find ourselves relying upon foreign sources of plasma. We've known for eight, nine months now how sketchy those supply lines can be, and for something as essential as plasma the current UCP government is suggesting that we should continue our reliance on foreign supply. That's something that I believe is totally contrary to the logic. Now the supply chain that we have in place relies upon American compensated blood. The UCP wants to add Canadian compensated blood into that supply chain, but what happens to it? It gets exported.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be here today. I want to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for bringing forward this legislation that we're debating in third reading here this afternoon. It's my sincere pleasure to be able to speak in favour of Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. This is an act that will remove yet another change made by the opposition when they were in government. Their bill prohibited financial incentives to a donor who was providing life-saving plasma in a situation and at a time when there was already a very low supply of plasma in Canada. Albertans: we know that they care about their fellow citizens and that they, when they can, want to give back to their fellow citizens.

Madam Speaker, this plasma donation bill is an important bill to move forward on. We know that blood plasma donation is much more involved than regular blood donation. It can actually take up to two hours. Asking somebody to donate that amount of time for blood plasma is a significant time that is often hard to find in

people's lives, so encouraging them to be able to do that is important.

Now, between the Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec we know that only about 16.7 per cent of plasma demands in Canada are actually being met. That means, Madam Speaker, that 83.3 per cent of the blood plasma that's used in this country is imported from other countries. That leaves us in a precarious situation at times. This simply is unacceptable for our nation, which is a world-wide leader in many areas of health care. This situation has left patients vulnerable, and we can do better than that.

Now, the point is not to blame the national average on the decision-making of any one particular government, but rather it's to point out and to show how Albertans can be leaders in this area. Repealing this restrictive act will allow further opportunities to incentivize current and future donors to donate to our country's blood and plasma lifeline. Contributing to global plasma supplies will also protect our patients from potential shortages due to changes in other countries that we are currently dependent on. It's important for us to increase and to deal with the issue that we have in Canada so that we're not at the mercy of foreign issues that may come up in other countries of blood and plasma supplies.

Now, in Alberta and more broadly in Canada we should be contributing more plasma to the global supply, and by making it possible to once again incentivize plasma donation, this will help to ensure that Canadian patients are less vulnerable to those supply shocks. This is not a matter of partisanship or even an economic debate; this is about looking after ourselves and after our neighbours. This is the way we do things in Canada; this is the way we do things in Alberta, where we do take practical steps to take care of the people that we live in community with.

One of the main criticisms of this bill, Madam Speaker, is the risk of safety to donors or to the recipients of blood plasma supplies by increasing the amount of donations, and this is simply just not the case. There have been zero confirmed cases of disease transmitted through plasma in over 20 years. At the same time, donors will continue to receive the same excellent care from donor clinics, abiding by all the health and safety standards. This criticism that this is not a safe process to move forward with: the numbers just aren't there.

Bill 204 is also going to allow for the potential for compensation. Hopefully, we believe that this will increase plasma donations. Given the longer time that it takes to donate, we believe that this is an appropriate course of action, that this compensation will not cancel out current health protocols.

The bill in no way decreases our very high standards where it comes to ensuring that the donations are safe for those who need them. In addition, donors will still be screened every time they go to a donor clinic to ensure the highest standards of patient safety. This screening is not new. It's been done for decades. Now, to protect the health and the well-being of donors, all donors will still have to abide by the seven-day wait period between plasma donations. What we have here is a bill that is going to incentivize blood plasma donation while maintaining the high standards that we have in this province for all blood and plasma donations.

Our province and our country cannot continue with the current system for collecting plasma. We have not been able to meet our needs and our own demands through voluntary uncompensated donations of blood and blood plasma. Again, as a country that serves as a world leader in health care, we must set a better example, especially with our supply of plasma. Diversifying the sources of global plasma supply will benefit not only the world but our Canadian patients as well that require the life-saving properties of this extremely valuable resource.

So it gives me a great deal of pleasure to be able to stand up and speak today in favour of private member's Bill 204, the Voluntary Blood Donations Repeal Act. Again, through you to the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, thank you for this well-thought-out and very meaningful piece of legislation. Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to stress that we support increasing the blood supply here in Alberta so that patients can be healthy. My concern is that this particular bill is not going to do exactly that, which is going to be focused on the health of Albertans themselves.

I think that for several of the members on this side of the House, particularly the Member for Edmonton-McClung, who just spoke, our main concern is people who are marginalized within our society. This is something, you know, I've stressed in this House multiple times. We understand that the members on the opposite side of this House, they believe completely in supply and demand, as we do. It's the nature of the capitalist system. It's the way that things work in our economy. But we cannot forget that with supply and demand there are individuals within our society who are priced out of that negotiation. That's essentially what it is. It's people negotiating the price of goods and services within our economy.

Now, naturally speaking, if people are being priced out of that process, then these people are going without. It's been the long-time belief of myself as well as many other members within this House that when it comes to specifically education, health care, housing, and other important public services, the government must intervene and provide options for these individuals that are priced out of the system.

Now, unfortunately, under the current government that we have in power to this day here in the province of Alberta, they don't seem to care very much about these individuals who are marginalized. We just finished hearing about how the simple move of the date change and when AISH recipients were to receive their monthly funding from the AISH program devastatingly affected these very people. We're talking about thousands of people that live here in the province of Alberta, Madam Chair – pardon me, Madam Speaker. This is the primary group, when I get up into this House, when I get in this House and I get up to speak in this House, that I choose not to ignore.

3:40

Now, don't get me wrong. They're not all Albertans, and I completely agree that we need focus on a very well-balanced and holistic perspective when we are applying the law on creating new laws here as it is our responsibility within this House. I understand that we need to take into perspective the majority of the stakeholders when it comes to the issues that come forward within this House, but we cannot continue to ignore the most marginalized within our economic system, those very individuals that I just finished expressing are priced out of the process of supply and demand, because they're Albertans, too. My opinion, based on comments that I've heard within this House from members on the other side, is that somehow these people are less Albertan, that we should have some kind of two-tiered system when it comes to our health care, which is exactly what this government is actually advocating for, to privatize our health care system and, in essence, with this bill as well to privatize this whole process of the donation of blood here in the province of Alberta.

My concern, of course, is that where we see this being applied in other jurisdictions, you see a lot of people from black populations,

from Latino populations all over the United States then going into sell their blood because if you can't sell your labour, then what else are you going to sell, Madam . . .

Mr. Schow: Speaker.

Member Loyola: Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. I wanted to call her Madam Chair again. I don't know; most of the time we see the hon. member is sitting in the chair during committee, and I'm just stuck on committee mode. Pardon me, Madam Speaker. With much respect, and I offer you the apology.

Madam Speaker, as I continue to state, this is really my primary concern because we already see that we have marginalized people within the province of Alberta – right? – specifically indigenous populations. We see people in rural. One of the things that – and I'll admit. I'll admit this. Before being elected, I did have connections with several rural communities. But the deeply held secret of so many rural communities was the amount of people within these rural communities who were actually homeless.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but according to Standing Order 8(7)(a)(iii), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's bill to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to close debate on Bill 204.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. As the debate on my private member's bill comes to a close, I believe that the majority of the House understands this bill. They understand the benefits to Albertans and Canadians, and they understand the long-term objectives that it will enhance our society and economy. By simply repealing Bill 3 from 2017, we're sending a message. The message is that Alberta wants to participate in the research and innovation that is going on in the biopharmaceutical sector. We also want to contribute positively to an international issue; this is, a scarcity of plasma-based pharmaceuticals.

Ultimately it's about the patients: the Albertans, the Canadians, one might say the people from all over the world who need this product. They need the help of medical advances like those that they're showing in this biopharmaceutical field with this product, plasma. With five countries of 195 countries in the world providing 90 per cent of the available plasma to make these life-saving products, we need to do our part. Yes, we're the second-highest purchaser per capita of these pharmaceuticals, so maybe as Canadians our access isn't an issue because we're a wealthy nation. But what about the people in the rest of the world? Can we help them by contributing to the international supply?

The opposition to my bill is unfortunate, hypocritical, and ultimately shallow. With arguments that stem from the tainted blood scandal of the '80s, purely for issues related to organized labour, demonstrated by demonization and slander through the different social mediums, ultimately signifying nothing, the truth prevailed through the masses to those that were listening with open minds. If the opposition were true to the morals that they preach, then their original Bill 3 would have banned these plasma-based pharmaceuticals, that our Alberta health care insurance plan purchases from these international biopharmaceutical companies, that they denigrate.

There's a pragmatic acceptance that we need to work with these companies that are currently located in places like the United States and Germany and perhaps invite them to work with our hospitals and universities in finding cures for people of the world. Health Canada has provided much in the way of documenting factual information for Canadians, and it's comforting to know that a federal institution like that does not bend to political partisan

influences, only providing a strong, science-based argument with factual information in the name of health. The Expert Panel on Immune Globulin Product Supply and Related Impacts in Canada from 2018 certainly objectively assessed the situation and found that concerns around the safety of plasma-based products, whether by chartered or public agencies, were unfounded.

I'd like to give thanks to these advocates of these life-saving therapies. Silvia Marchesin belongs to the Network of Rare Blood Disorder Organizations, a coalition of not-for-profits representing people with rare blood disorders or conditions who are recipients of blood products or their alternatives. Kate Vander Meer works for plasma for all, who advocates for reliable access to plasma-derived medications for patients everywhere, and Whitney Goulstone supports the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization, who provide advocacy, support, and education for all immunodeficient patients in Canada. Because of the research and innovation in medical science invested in and performed by the international biopharmaceutical companies, these people have a hope.

I'd also like to thank Dr. Peter Jaworski, an ethics professor from Georgetown University. He's a Canadian boy with Polish roots and now calls the United States home. I want to thank him and his students for all the research and their pragmatic approach to this ethical dilemma that is our bodies and how we manage them in the 21st century. A big thanks to Georgetown University, who, in this age of wokeness and this age of revelation that has resulted in the suppression of debate and speech, has allowed one of their professors to go down this difficult path and come forward with facts that counter the current logic as dictated by the UN. This is refreshing.

Again, my inspirations for being here are two good friends who passed away because they were denied timely medical treatments that were available only in the United States. Michael Jean died at the age of 24 due to lymphoma. Bo Cooper was first diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia at the age of 20 and finally succumbed to this horrible disease at the age of 27. Both of these young men, my friends, were reliant on tests and treatments only available in the United States. I want these companies to be making these life-saving products here in Canada. I want Canada to be a leader in providing these life-saving products to the world.

With that, I'm asking for all members of this 30th Legislature to support my private member's bill that supports science, innovation, and health. I thank everyone.

With that, I move third reading of private member's Bill 204. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:48 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Lovely	Savage
Amery	Luan	Schow
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Madu	Schulz
Copping	Milliken	Sigurdson, R.J.
Getson	Neudorf	Singh
Glubish	Nixon, Jeremy	Smith
Guthrie	Orr	Stephan
Hanson	Reid	Walker
Issik	Rowswell	Yao
LaGrange		

Against the motion:

Dach	Phillips	Schmidt
Loyola	Renaud	
Totals:	For – 28	Against – 5

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a third time]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 205 Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to move second reading of Bill 205, the Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act.

It is undisputable that we are privileged to be living in a multicultural and diverse nation, the chosen home to people of different faiths and ethnic communities, and mostly it is because security, peace, and foresight of progress has made them choose to live in this land.

Now, with this diverse composition of our communities we cannot hide the fact that there are numerous members from some communities that have been genocide victims, survivors, or their descendants. The purpose of this bill, Madam Speaker, is to provide commemoration to the victims who have suffered and given up their lives as a result of these genocides. Also, this bill seeks to spread awareness, particularly to future generations, about what happened in the past so that it will be prevented in the future. By this bill the month of April each year will be designated as the period of genocide remembrance, condemnation, and prevention month.

Bill 205, Madam Speaker, acknowledges all the genocides that have been recognized by the government of Alberta and the Parliament of Canada, including the Jewish Holocaust, the Ukrainian Holodomor, the Rwandan genocide, the Armenian genocide, the Yazidi genocide, the Srebrenica genocide, and the Rohingya genocide.

In April of 2015 the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion, M-587, with the same purpose as this bill. Also, a similar bill is under consideration at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. In fact, Madam Speaker, the Alberta Legislature has passed in November 2000 the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Day Act and in November 2008 the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act.

I want to note that over the summer the House of Commons unanimously voted to recognize the Romany genocide. The Romany genocide was perpetrated by the Nazis and involved the murder of over 500,000 Romany people. Unfortunately, I had signed off on the final text of my bill at the time, and the Romany genocide has not been included. However, the ordering of this bill, section 3 in particular, is not limiting as to which genocides to remember and condemn.

This shows that debates on genocide recognition are ongoing. More importantly, it shows that these are not closed issues and that some genocides may still be perpetuated today and in the future. In my view, this reality makes Bill 205 more, not less, relevant and necessary.

With this bill, Madam Speaker, we restate our firm message expressing disapproval of inhumane acts, racial discrimination, and

hatred in our country and the world. Nevertheless, Bill 205 neither seeks division nor goes against the authorities or the members in those countries where genocides happened but focuses on spreading awareness in prevention of future genocides and to remember the lives of the victims.

A survey in September 2018, conducted by New York City-based Schoen consulting, of 1,100 Canadians indicated that 22 per cent of responders between 18 and 34 were unaware or unsure if they had heard of the Holocaust. According to Heidi Berger, professor of communications at Montreal's Concordia University and head of the Foundation for Genocide Education, education is the answer.

4:10

In one of the articles of Dr. Alon Ben-Meir, a professor and senior fellow at New York University Center for Global Affairs and senior fellow at the world policy institute, he mentioned, "The fact that the current young generation is becoming increasingly less aware of genocides that occurred even two decades ago is extremely worrying." He goes on and states that 81 per cent of the 800 students from 15 schools in Britain could not name any genocide that occurred since the Holocaust.

The UNESCO put forward the significance of teaching about past genocides, which was laid out under UN General Assembly resolution 60/7 in 2005, UNESCO General Conference resolution 34C/61 in 2007 on Holocaust remembrance. They had indicated that it can play a key role in preventing genocide by providing a forum to address past violence while promoting the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that can help prevent current-day group-targeted violence.

In Quebec in the fall of last year a pilot project was launched to have a universal teaching guide on genocide in selected schools, Madam Speaker. In the online poll commissioned by Jack Jedwab, president of the Association for Canadian Studies, more than 53 per cent of Quebecers said that they didn't learn in school that roughly 6 million European Jews were murdered by the Nazis during the Second World War, while the Canadian average is 35 per cent. Moreover, according to B'nai Brith Canada, anti-Semitic instances rose roughly 17 per cent between 2017 and 2018 across Canada. With these saddening numbers, spreading of information about genocide is really important.

The resulting product would be the promotion of continuous peace and reinforcing one's sense of acceptance. It also promotes the empowerment of the protection of human rights. What is troubling is that there were some genocides that had happened in just recent years. Innovation and modernization cannot prevent it from happening, but we can use this as a tool to provide better knowledge about the historical atrocities. If this bill will pass, Madam Speaker, I am sure that it will pave the way for increasing genocide awareness in Alberta.

Before I end, let me express my view on the residential school system and the issue of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report explained that residential schools amounted to cultural genocide. However, cultural genocide is not within the scope of this bill. Bill 205 is based on the definition of genocide as found in article II of the UN convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. I share the Premier's recognition that the residential school system was fundamentally racist in its nature and was an official policy of the government of Canada, supported as well by the government of Alberta, other provincial governments, and institutions of civil society, and the racism that lies in the heart of the residential schools continues to reoccur for indigenous communities in our own time.

Our government is taking concrete action to address racism and to remove barriers to prosperity for indigenous people. Initiatives like the Alberta indigenous corporations and work to modernize the Police Act demonstrate our commitment to meaningful reconciliation and to empower indigenous communities so we can be partners in prosperity. I believe the residential school system is a dark part of our history that needs to be remembered so it is not repeated. We currently observe June as Indigenous History Month, which includes highlighting the history of residential schools. Further, June 21 is celebrated as National Indigenous Peoples Day. Again, this is an opportunity to learn about the heritage, culture, and achievements of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

On the other hand, the government is taking the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women seriously. The Minister of Indigenous Relations personally attended and received the national inquiry's final report. Also, the government established the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to provide advice.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 205, the Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act. I want to thank my colleague from Calgary for presenting this bill, and I do want to just touch on the definition of genocide that he mentioned in his comments. He referred to the definition of genocide that was used to inform this bill, yet it's interesting to me that that definition of genocide is not actually written into this bill. I think a number of my colleagues will have a number of things to say on that point, but it's fair to say that if there is a specific definition of genocide that the members opposite wish to use when deciding how we recognize that term and recognize those events here in the province of Alberta, then I think it's incumbent upon the members opposite to actually include that definition in the bill. I look forward to my colleagues fleshing out that idea much more completely than I will in my comments today.

One of the things that struck me as I read through the bill and heard my colleague from Calgary talk about this piece of legislation is the fact that there are a number of communities whose members have been victims or families have been victims of genocide around the world. In fact, this bill sets out a few examples, and I don't think it intends to limit itself to just these examples that are listed in the bill. However, it's interesting to me that in his remarks the member from Calgary stated that we have acts of the Legislature here in Alberta that formally recognize the Holocaust and formally recognize the Ukrainian Holodomor. I have spoken to members of these other communities that are listed in this particular bill. Certainly, members of the Armenian community, members of the Rwandan community and the Yazidi and Rohingya communities have spoken to me at various times and asked for these acts of genocide to be remembered by their own statutes here in Alberta.

I will express that call to the members opposite, the government of the day. If this government is genuinely committed to remembering acts of genocide and wants to educate the people of Alberta about what has happened to these communities throughout history, then I would suggest that this bill doesn't go far enough. I would encourage members opposite to bring forward acts of legislation that recognizes each of these historical events individually. I don't think that we lose anything by bringing the Alberta Legislature's attention specifically to the Armenian genocide or specifically to the Rwandan genocide or specifically to the Srebrenica massacre or specifically to the Yazidi genocide or

specifically to the Rohingya genocide. My fear is that by including all of these acts, these historical travesties in one piece of legislation, we perhaps lose some of the context and historical underpinnings of what happened to these communities in each of these individual cases.

4:20

I will summarize that point by saying that if the government is genuinely committed to making sure that Albertans understand the horrors of these historical acts and wants Albertans to remember them, then they should take the time to bring forward individual acts of legislation so that each of these communities has their moment of remembrance.

I think it's also really important to remember that Canada is not blameless in a lot of these acts. We knew that these things were happening, and we didn't do enough to prevent them. That's certainly true of the Holocaust. It was two or three years ago, I think, that Prime Minister Trudeau stood up in the Legislature and offered a formal apology to the passengers of the ship called the *St. Louis*, that carried about 250 Jewish refugees from continental Europe. They were denied access to our country because the immigration policy of our country at that time was that accepting no Jews was too many. When we denied those passengers of the *MS St. Louis* a safe haven here in our country, they were eventually turned back to continental Europe, where many of them perished in the Holocaust. It's not that we didn't know. We knew full well that the Hitler regime was systematically slaughtering the Jewish people, yet we actively turned these people away from our shores and we directly contributed to their deaths when we could have saved their lives.

There is a particular story that's of importance to me, Madam Speaker. Because I'm a graduate of the Queen's chemistry program, we benefited a lot in the chemistry department from the philanthropy of a man named Alfred Bader. Alfred Bader was a prominent Canadian industrialist who was a Jew, a European Jew, who ended up going to Queen's because he was kicked out of Great Britain for fear of being a spy during World War II. It's interesting to note that Winston Churchill, the great battler of Nazis, kicked Jews out of his own country because he thought that they were spies. They ended up coming here. Alfred Bader was one of them. He was 16 years old. Alfred Bader ended up being accepted into Canada, miracle of miracles, and was turned away from his original choice of universities, McGill University, because McGill, in their opinion, already had enough Jews at their school and they didn't want any more. Thankfully, the good people of Queen's University accepted Alfred Bader when no other university, including McGill, would accept him because of his Jewish faith. He never forgot that kindness and donated millions and millions of dollars once he became a successful entrepreneur and industrialist. The chemistry students at Queen's University still benefit from his largesse.

But my point remains, Madam Speaker, that in remembering these acts of genocide, it is incumbent upon all of us to remember that Canada is not blameless and that we are responsible for the deaths of many of those who perished in the Holocaust because we failed to act.

It's also true of the Rwandan genocide. You know, I was a young man when news of what was happening in Rwanda was in all of the coverage here in Canada. Many years ago I happened to read General Roméo Dallaire's book *Shake Hands with the Devil*. That was an incredibly sobering reflection upon Canada's failure to act in preventing the Rwanda genocide. I urge all members of the House if they haven't had a chance to read that book to please do so because Roméo Dallaire, General Dallaire, in that book outlines a number of ways that Canada and the rest of the international

community failed the people of Rwanda. Had we acted properly, we could have prevented hundreds of thousands of deaths. I'm certain of that, Madam Speaker.

So I urge all members, when they consider how they vote on this bill, that they take a moment to remember that Canada has failed in the past to adequately act to prevent these acts of genocide when we had the power to do so.

Now, it's encouraging to me that this piece of legislation does include a requirement for the minister to file a report annually in front of the Legislature to discuss the things that we've learned about genocide and what we could do differently. I certainly . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 205? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act. This is an important bill. To start with some personal anecdotes relating to this, years ago when I was a student in university, I participated in model UN. I was fortunate to be able to participate in a national model UN held at the ICAO building in Montreal. I went as a delegate for Pakistan. The delegate from Turkey, his wife went into labour, so he could no longer sit in the model UN, and they called upon me to come in and represent Turkey at this model United Nations. I thought: "Okay. Well, I know a little bit about Turkey. I think I can handle that."

At any rate, a couple of days in there was a group of students who approached me in the hallway. They were Armenian, and they wanted to let me know about the Armenian genocide and how important it was that it be recognized. I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, that at that point, third year of university, I did not know about the Armenian genocide. How could that have possibly happened? The consul for Turkey had me up to his office after that and convinced me that, well, there's nothing to see here. I was pretty confused. What was all this about the Armenian genocide? Again, I had not been educated about the Armenian genocide.

Little did I know that a few years after that, just a few years, I would meet a man that I ended up marrying who is Assyrian, and he told me about the Assyrian genocide that happened within the same context as the Armenian genocide and the Pontian and Anatolian Greek genocide; 275,000 Assyrian people were murdered, and those are the numbers that were reported at the Treaty of Lausanne by the Assyrian delegation.

I can tell you personally the effect that it's had on my husband and his family. They have all fled Turkey now. They're scattered around the world, as many survivors of many genocides are. They were fortunate. Many landed in Sweden and Germany as refugees. There are many here in Canada and the United States but all scattered around the world. It has an effect on families and it has an effect for many generations, and we know that. Today we're fortunate. My husband and I have many Armenian friends, who share many of the same stories.

I want to talk to you a little bit about my husband's close friend who passed a few years ago. He was a survivor of the Holocaust. He and his family survived because they were able to run. I remember him telling me stories of how they fled, how they hid in a graveyard one time for a number of days in the cold with nothing to eat, barely any clothing, how he buried his mother along the way, and how he ended up in Siberia. He survived the Holocaust, but we know that 6 million other Jewish people did not survive the Holocaust.

4:30

We know that many of us were educated in the facts around the Holocaust, but I know that, like many, we wonder: how on earth

could that have happened? How on earth could it have happened? I'm going to come back to that in a minute.

I'm still gobsmacked by the fact that I had not known anything about the Armenian genocide. But, you know, since that time we've had more genocides: the Rwandan genocide – let's see; that was in '94 – the massacre at Srebrenica in '95, in 2014 the Yazidi genocide, in 2017 the Rohingya genocide. And the world sadly watches today as the Uighurs are facing crimes against humanity in Xinjiang province in China.

Next week we'll commemorate the Holodomor. On January 27 we will commemorate the Holocaust on the international day of remembrance for the Holocaust, and April 21 this year will be Yom ha-Shoah. It's not just important to commemorate these events, these atrocities, though. We have to remember who died. We have to remember those who suffered and those who were left behind with the horrible aftermath of trauma and the unimaginable sadness.

We have to educate ourselves and our young people. We must know our history. We cannot remember that which we do not know; therefore, we must teach the history. We must teach the understanding of the causes, the conditions that give rise to genocide, atrocities, and crimes against humanity, the societal conditions, the political conditions, and the recognition of the roles of dehumanizing, complicity, and passivity, or being a bystander. It's these last three items where we can truly make a difference, Madam Speaker. You see, we can teach our young children. We can teach them these concepts before they're able to understand the atrocities. We can teach them how name-calling affects people, how bullying, how helping others be bullies, or standing by as bullies go after others affects people. We can teach young children the value of humanity, and we can teach them this as the context for when they learn of the horrible atrocities that they must learn through history.

As I said, every year the 27th of January serves as the international day of remembrance for the Holocaust. It's essential to honour and pay tribute to the memories of all the victims and all those affected by the horrific event, but it's equally important to affirm the importance of instilling the value of countering anti-Semitism, racism, and all other forms of intolerance.

When we think about education around the Holocaust and other genocides, I think it's important that we highlight the following: first, the systematic, bureaucratic, and state-sponsored elements that led to all of these awful historical events. Secondly, we need to understand the fragility of all societies and their institutions, which are meant to protect the rights and freedoms of all. Third, we need to understand the dangers of prejudice, discrimination, and dehumanization and their effect on broader society. Fourth, society must understand and evaluate the actions of perpetrators, victims, and others who may tolerate, ignore, or act against hatred for a variety of reasons. Again, the perpetrators, the victims, and others. It's not enough just to talk about the perpetrators; we need to talk about the victims, and we need to understand how all of this interacts.

We must uncover and discern the reasons to provide astute comprehension of how these historic events arise in the first place. We also must emphasize international institutions and the norms developed in response to, first of all, the Holocaust, right after World War II, and the numerous international agreements that have been signed to promote and encourage human rights, the rule of law, equality, antiracism, and other values universally accepted as important in stopping future atrocities.

Finally, the last element of Holocaust and genocide education must highlight the important work that is being done to respond to modern genocide. We all need to understand this, and we all need to keep apprised of this, and that is why I think this bill is important.

It's not just a month for commemoration or a month for remembrance. It is a month to talk about prevention, and education is the key to that: education for our young children, historical education, and society-wide. Never again.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to a private member's bill that is as fundamentally important as this particular bill is. The history of genocide, the murder, the destruction, and the undermining of various communities by others who deemed themselves to be their enemies over the history of humanity, is certainly a part of our being human that we need to view with open eyes, with contrite hearts, and a steely determination to ensure that this type of behaviour becomes a factor only of our past and not of our present and not of our future.

I know that as I grew up and slowly started to learn about some of the holocausts that have occurred, some of the genocides, some of the evil that has been perpetrated on behalf of one community in attempts to destroy and eliminate other communities, it had been very hard at first to be present to it, to stay with it, to truly bring my understanding and my empathy and my being to the significance of these events over the years. That has made it very hard, but I've always found that when I've been able to force myself to engage in learning about these horrendous events and taking time to work within myself on, "What is the meaning of this to me, and what are the implications to me and the types of behaviours I should engage in moving forward?" I think it's always been very fruitful to go through the very difficult and stressful learning process. It's something I certainly would encourage everyone in this House and, of course, everyone in the province of Alberta to do.

I remember, you know, that there were many times, of course, I'd been exposed to and learned about this. I remember, for example, that when I was in university, a young man of probably about the age of 20 or so, which seems very young to me now, I attended a film at the Princess Theatre called *Shoah*. It was about the extremely horrendous circumstances in the Warsaw ghetto. The film was 11 hours long, and I must admit I only made six hours of it just because, you know, I tend to be a bit of an emotionally based person, as I think some people in the House know, and I found it very hard. Even reflecting on this 40 years later, I'm finding myself being emotional.

4:40

I think that, you know, that process of me kind of opening myself up to as much as I could take at the time, to really understand that this, unfortunately, is a part of who we are as human beings, that our history is littered with these types of events, some of which have been recorded, some of which are memorialized in events, some with particular days, and some of which are not – I think it's very important for us not to get focused on each individual genocide as much as it is important for us to reflect on the nature of genocide, the desire that human beings have to eliminate others who they disagree with, who they believe to be their enemies. The lessons that we need to learn from that about how we need to understand ourselves and to conduct ourselves are very, very profound, and I think that all of us in this House are challenged to do that.

You know, I ask people to not just look at the list of genocides that are mentioned in this bill, because they're actually, in fact, only a small fraction of the genocides that have occurred in human history, but, rather, to look at the underlying intent here, and that is for us to make a commitment here in this House that we will choose

behaviours from this day forward which are contrary to the genocides given room to grow and choose behaviours that thwart any move toward genocidal behaviour, whether it happens here at home or abroad.

I think the first part of doing that is to first of all recognize that, unfortunately, this is a part of our human nature. It is not something, of course, that any of us would stand up here and claim with any relish at this particular time because of our, you know, awareness of the devastating effects of genocide, but still it is part of who we are as human beings and how we have acted in our time here on this Earth. That means that we need to come to a place of admission and acknowledge that genocides do occur, that genocides, having occurred before, could indeed occur again.

I know that just this last year, a year ago, I had the opportunity to be in Berlin and to go to many of the sites that are memorials of the Holocaust that occurred against the Jewish population and others during the Second World War and was stunned to see on the walls of one of them a statement – sorry; I can't remember the exact words – essentially saying that if it happened once, it can happen again. The call to action from that, to remember that it isn't about somehow acknowledging some historical event but that it's about taking responsibility for doing an analysis of the things that are happening here and now in our society and deriving from that analysis an understanding of the behaviours and the actions that are done both by individuals and by societies, by governments, by institutions that actually engender that kind of action, ultimately resulting in genocide – that call to action is very important and very significant to me in terms of the choices that I hope I am making now.

I think that a big part of my concern about this particular piece of legislation is that I think it is bringing with it some blinders with regard to some of the genocides that we need to pay attention to. Of course, I specifically speak to the genocide, that I have spoken about in this House, of indigenous people in this province and in this country over the last 600 years. I think it's very important for us not to turn our heads away, not to pretend that somehow what has happened to indigenous people in this country does not fit with what has happened to many other people in many other places.

Now, I'm very careful not to compare genocides. I've been certainly taught that by people in the Jewish community who have helped me to get a deeper understanding of the implications of the Holocaust. They've said: you cannot compare one that has happened to another; what you need to do is you need to come to a place of truly understanding the reality and the possibility that genocide can exist somewhere in our society now and is waiting for a chance to bubble forward.

That's what's important. I guess the part that I would like to support about the bill is the fact that we are acknowledging this fact of genocide, but what we are not doing is that we are not focusing on the nature of genocide and the fact that it does implicate many people beyond the few that are mentioned in the bill. I think deciding to pick a few out of the multitude is very problematic.

I know that I've been receiving a significant amount of correspondence from First Nations and Métis and Inuit people in this province over the last number of weeks because of the sort of complete failure of the government to actually tie the word "genocide" . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I remember when the Member for Calgary . . .

An Hon. Member: East.

Member Loyola: . . . Calgary-East – thank you very much, sir – actually introduced this bill into the House. I immediately opened it, and as is common with pieces of legislation, Madam Speaker, there's a whole section dedicated to definitions, sometimes more extensive than others, so my immediate reaction to hearing about the bill was: okay; I'm really eager to see if the private member is going to take the opportunity to actually provide a definition for genocide.

You know, oftentimes you get into these, you know, even amongst friends and family, debates, perhaps call them political, and you get into this stage of: well, now we're just arguing semantics. But the truth is, Madam Speaker, that you need to be able to agree on the definition of specific terms before you can even have a debate. I find it astounding that within a bill that would be dedicated to the remembrance and condemnation and the prevention of genocide, the definition isn't even held within.

With that in mind, you know, perhaps I'm going to put my homework cap on, and I'm perhaps going to bring forward some amendments on that, hopefully. I do want to take this opportunity to speak to specifically that. For example, in the Rome statute right under article 6 section (e) it specifically states, "Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

You know, I respect the opinion of the Member for Calgary-East when he gets up in this House and states that for some reason the direction that he got on his own private member's bill – I don't think he stipulated exactly who gave him that advice. It seemed to me that from his comments – and I would have to check the Blues – through you, Madam Speaker, I would suggest that the member was actually talking about getting advice from the government itself on his own particular private member's bill, which is fine if that's the way that private members of the government caucus would like to use their time within this House. It's completely up to them. Completely up to them.

With that being said, I think that it's important that when we look specifically at the history of Canada, the history of Alberta, we go to internationally acknowledged definitions of genocide. Of course, as has been stated by members on both sides of the House, we have so much to learn when it actually comes to addressing these issues. I would find it astounding that within a bill produced by this Legislature regarding genocide, we would not include indigenous people right here in Alberta and in Canada when it comes to discussing this particular issue. One cannot deny how indigenous people were treated upon European conquest.

4:50

I include all over the Americas, Madam Speaker, because, as you know, I'm originally from South America, where also indigenous people had to suffer genocide. Within research that I've read on all over the Americas, we're talking about millions of indigenous people that were killed upon conquest. When the Europeans, specifically the Spaniards, came in and decided that they were going to lay claim to the so-called Americas – you know, I don't mean to offend anybody with what I'm saying. What I'm trying to do is exactly what the member across did when she got up to speak, to emphatically state that I agree. We need to learn from all of these things.

Now, within the bill there are a number of genocides that are recognized, genocidal acts throughout the world. It's also surprising to me that – and I say this because I represent an electoral district that has a high population of Punjabis and Sikhs within my electoral district, my riding. I know that there are other ridings out there that also have a high percentage of Punjabis and Sikhs, Sikhs

specifically, within their ridings. For me, it's surprising that the 1984 Sikh genocide isn't being recognized within this particular bill.

Now, I've had the opportunity to sit and discuss and learn from what happened within the Punjab and the five rivers back in 1984. Members of the community shared with me so many stories about the atrocities that were committed, especially among young males, back in 1984. I'm even doubtful whether I should share them here on the record. I recognize that it's not my story to tell. It's the Sikhs in our communities all over Alberta that want to tell these stories, because they've told them to me.

I would hope that this Legislature would open not only its ears and not only its mind but also its heart when it comes to listening to the members of our community who are from the Sikh religion and Punjabi ethnicity so that they can share their stories about what happened back in 1984, which begs me to ask the question, Madam Speaker: who did the member consult with when actually putting together this particular bill? I would hope that he would have had an opportunity to actually sit down with members from wide-ranging ethnic backgrounds to specifically speak to them about introducing this here bill into the House because there are so many stories. There're so many stories.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I appreciate members on the other side of the House who've gotten up and shared stories about experiences that they have through relationships that they have made throughout their experience, their own history here within the province and in this world. I think it's absolutely essential that we take the opportunity to consult with as many Albertans as we possibly can because what happens is that this bill makes it into law, and members of the community, Albertans here in the province of Alberta look at this bill and say, "Hey, how come my community" – Sikhs emphatically state that 1984 was a genocide, Mr. Speaker. Now, I'm not saying that we have to agree wholeheartedly, but at least listen – at least listen – and make sure that the community knows that they had an opportunity to provide their stories when it comes to this here particular bill.

I actually applaud the member for bringing this bill forward because I want to be able to support it. I really do want to be able to support it but cannot do that at this time, so I'm looking forward to amendments.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has approximately four minutes remaining.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the Chamber today to speak on Bill 205, the Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act, moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I sit on the Private Bills Committee that reviewed this bill prior to coming to the Assembly and was honoured to hear him present there. This bill aims to do a number of things, but what it ultimately does is force us to have difficult conversations, difficult conversations about sensitive topics, something that the good people of Cardston-Siksika elected me to do, not to shy away from those conversations, which is one of the reasons I stand in this Chamber today.

This bill declares April of each year as genocide remembrance, condemnation and prevention month. It requires the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women to table a report within one year that outlines strategies to combat the causes of genocide, including recognizing the impact of the atrocity of genocide of individuals who belong to many different religious and

ethnic communities in Alberta. The bill also recognizes seven genocides. In particular I'd like to speak about one today, and this goes back to me mentioning hard conversations.

When I was in university, we had a professor in my Russian programs. His name was Yuri Leving. Yuri was of Jewish descent and thought it would be important and valuable to bring in a Holocaust survivor to speak to our class. This was a class that usually had a handful of students in it, maybe 10 or 12, if I recall properly. On that day that classroom was packed because word got around that there was an opportunity to hear from someone who had survived the Holocaust. He relayed a number of stories, most of which I won't be able to talk to you about today for lack of time, but what I will say is that you would not find in that room a single dry eye, Mr. Speaker. The things that this gentleman talked about cut right to the most raw emotions.

In particular one story he told that really broke my heart was when he and a number of others were piled onto a train car and left there for a very long time. There was a baby in the car. A woman was holding a baby. That baby eventually began to cry, and that baby cried, and it cried, and it continued to cry until it just stopped crying. It wasn't because that baby was soothed. That baby passed away on that train in its mother's arms.

These are the kinds of atrocious acts that have happened in history at the hands of some of the world's worst dictators. You don't need to go into greater detail, again for lack of time, but I wanted to learn more, so in 2016 when I was in Washington, D.C., for a weekend for a course for my masters program, of all the museums that I could visit there, I went to the Holocaust museum because I felt it was important to have those difficult conversations.

I believe you will be cutting me off.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. However, it is now 5 o'clock, and the time for consideration of this matter has concluded for today. The next time that this item for debate is called, we'll have approximately 65 minutes remaining for debate.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Anti-Racism Advisory Council Recommendations

512. Mr. Deol moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm its support for measures that identify and address racism in Alberta and urge the government to (a) ensure that all recommendations of the Anti-Racism Advisory Council are publicly available in their original form, and (b) lay before the Assembly a work plan for the implementation of the council's recommendations and provide regular updates on the progress of the work plan.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Anti-Racism Advisory Council was established by the former NDP government. The job that was ascribed, the purview of the advisory council was to undertake the work to tackle racism in the province and then make recommendations to the government on the action plan they'd made. The long view, I would say – the work on the issue of antiracism should have been addressed.

Since the UCP came to government in 2019, there have been many concerns. What is the goal? Lots has been said in the public, in the media. The committee's status quite fell into limbo for a while. It took long to know that the new government that came into office would recognize the council and would work with the council to combat and work at racism. We know about the very serious

events that took place south of the border, the historical protests that took place in our province and around the world after the incident in Minneapolis, the unjust death of George Floyd. Thousands of people, as the media reported, about 14,000 people, on the grounds of this Legislature and thousands in Calgary demanded action against racism. Not only that, we hear from our constituents on a daily basis the incidents of racism based on one or the other issues.

I recall my trip to Calgary last month on October 2 and meeting with some of the community members, the members of Black Chambers, indigenous groups, South Asian community members. In one way I was so, you know, happy to see the amount of work and enthusiasm in those groups. They're working to promote multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, and trying to provide places, spaces to those deprived in their communities, those with the very least to, like, no support.

What was painful: the story is still stuck into my mind. I was meeting the community members from an indigenous community. On October 2 the gentleman shared the story. His cousin just died in police custody the day before he was talking to me. That was October 1 this year, last month. Then I had a conversation with another community member. Her sister was killed eight years back. She was beheaded, and the pieces of her body were, you know, found in different places in the province. What is concerning here is not only that we are losing lives and people are still experiencing racism, discrimination, but also the system is totally failing them. There's very little support from the system when it comes to dealing with these issues for the suffering families. There was no real support for the family that is going through that pain, and all I heard about them – they have a file number to wait for that result. Somebody has for eight years. The other family was just handed it the day before I was having the conversation.

There was a story in CBC. I wanted to print it and just table it in the House, but I didn't get a chance. I hope many of you will have probably read the story of Minnie Akparook, if I'm not mispronouncing her name, one of the first indigenous nurses. She lost her seven siblings. Out of eight she was the only one who survived in her family in situations like going through relocations, dispossessions, hunger, residential schools. She joined a residential school, but she got influenced by someone, happened to have a nurse who moved here from England. She saw how she was helping humanity and helped her parents through the pain and suffering when one by one her mother was losing her kids. And she kind of decided to become that kind of person that can contribute back to the community.

It took her 20 years to complete her two years of nursing program because she belonged to one community. She was declined, she was rejected again and again. She started out nursing in the '80s, and she completed her nursing in, if I'm not wrong, 1994 because of all those barriers she was facing. And she came second in the class. She said: when I had the degree in my hand, the results in my hand, I wish I could call all those people who were refusing my entry to the program and show them what my ability was, what I wanted to contribute.

What I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, is that if this motion is passed, this will, you know, provide accountability to the House.

5:10

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member. Unfortunately, the time has concluded.

The hon. the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, I see, is on her feet.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Meadows. So many of the things that

we need to talk about with antiracism are actually about talking about the real stories, about what happened to people. It differs in many different ways, but one of the most important things, what is required, are the real and honest stories about what happened to individuals and how it is that we look at that situation and how it is that we help, and I agree with the member in the sense that there is so much more that needs to happen.

Mr. Speaker, this has been a year like no other. Along with the largest health and economic crisis we've also seen a global call for justice and an end to racism. In May the Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the death of George Floyd was one of those rare moments where you stand and you watch entire communities across the world join hands in solidarity to stand up for a culture, for a group of people. On the Legislature Grounds, as you know, we saw these 15,000 people, even amongst a COVID crisis, masked, standing together to learn and listen and stand in solidarity, and those demonstrations and community actions have continued and are really pushing and giving momentum across this province and across the country and across the globe.

I want to thank my dear friends the Minister of Justice and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for being here this evening and to speak about your personal experiences because it's those personal experiences that help us define what our jobs are, what our reasons are, and how it is that we move forward and how we do better. Our MLAs and ministers know from a lot of lived experience throughout this entire House how important it is to tackle racism, but even more so it's about a head-on movement to looking at institutions and within our communities.

Now, over the last several years Alberta has become increasingly diverse, and I believe that our cabinet very much reflects that beautiful diversity in this province. Between us we speak 13 languages and intimately understand – intimately understand – the challenges that come from a difference of appearance or of speaking a different language or of many other things that are beautiful about the wonderful cultures that make up this province.

We also know that Alberta is growing faster, and the diverse groups and organizations and cultures and backgrounds that are coming to this province are really, really fulfilling and carrying on with that rich tapestry that is the history of this province. Out of Alberta's total population over 1 in 5 are immigrants, and 1 in 4 identify as a visible minority and almost 300,000 are people of indigenous background. These numbers are going to continue to rise, so addressing racism is a no-brainer and must be done in our institutions, in our world, in how we function, how we are with people, how we live.

As we work to recover from COVID-19 and working on economic diversification and moving forward as a province, this is our time to make sure that every single person can participate and contribute and succeed. If Albertans are held back from reaching their full potential, there's absolutely no way that this province can reach its full potential. I would prefer to not stoke division. I would prefer to bring diverse groups together and find solutions. There's a lens of multiculturalism that we can use, but those individual stories are really, really at the guts and the heartbeat of how it is that we change and how it is that we learn about society. Racism is fuelled by misunderstandings and fear, and when you sow that fear, when you continue down that path, you're adding to the fear and the misunderstanding of the people who most need understanding, love and compassion, and to be brought together in this province.

One important piece of the puzzle – and I mentioned this a few times – is being able to make sure that people can tell their stories and build relationships, and that is a natural way of promoting diversity. That is the work of antiracism. By learning more about each other and understanding these beautiful cultural perspectives,

can we then not move ahead to celebrate, celebrate and discover the differences and similarities that make this province so magnificent? Sharing those traditional arts and culture and music and food is a window to understanding our deeper beliefs and traditions and understanding each other. After all, I think every single person in this House wants the same thing. We want a safe home, the ability to provide for ourselves and our families, and the freedom to be able to pursue our dreams.

When we are looking at how you build a more diverse and inclusive province, these cannot just be words. This is about inspiring Albertans to share their culture and to learn more about each other. You know, in the government we've had the huge privilege, really, of hosting a lot of events and flinging the doors open of the Legislature and McDougall Centre and the Federal Building. This is the people of Alberta's home. It's their house. To be able to do that and bring folks in and be able to share our cultural backgrounds has been one of the most beautiful things that I've been able to participate in, whether I was in opposition or in government, building those relationships.

We've hosted Black History Month and Diwali and Lunar New Year and Vaisakhi and Eid al-Fitr and Filipino Independence Day and Ukrainian heritage day, just to name a few. There are so many more. We've engaged thousands and thousands and thousands of Albertans. Actually, since these events have had to go virtual, just like Diwali did on the weekend and Bandi Chhor Divas – right? – we've had thousands more people being able to join us, because some of them wouldn't normally be able to come to our event. As sad as it was to not be in person, it was really wonderful to be able to celebrate that. Recordings of the virtual events are posted online afterwards, and we've done media releases and declarations on social media and statements in the Legislature. These are all important pieces of educating and understanding where we all come from and who we are.

One of the aspects of living in such a diverse province and engaging and serving people that speak so many different languages is figuring out how it is that we reach them. During COVID all of the information went out in a minimum of eight languages. As you know, we are in Family Violence Prevention Month. The One Line is also available in over 200 languages. This is an important piece of the puzzle because inclusion isn't just in including people in society; it's about listening to their stories and making sure that they have places to be able to tell what is going on in their own situations and that they're not being turned away, that they can hear their language, that they're able to communicate, that we're able to get to them and help them and find the gaps in the system.

I've been privileged to host several town halls with cultural groups, especially over COVID, to be able to reach out to those organizations and have really heartfelt conversations about how things are going, how they're doing in their communities. How are they, their faith leaders, you know, reaching out to their communities and building love and compassion at a time when people feel so isolated and alone? So many of these organizations took food curbside and helped out senior citizens and took people to their doctors' appointments. I mean, the list just goes on and on, and it is overwhelming in the most beautiful way possible.

Like myself, the Premier and Dr. Hinshaw have also had ongoing communications with leaders and faith groups and other organizations across the province to make sure that there are specific guidelines to help us through this time. As hard as this has been, I have to say – and I think most of us would agree – the outreach has been very different, very intentional. That intentional outreach changes the way that you have with people. Any unconscious biases that any of us have are gone, because you have

these amazing conversations with incredible people who do so much to keep our province together.

5:20

Our government's approach to our community, the province, the country, the globe is about diligently working together to overcome the challenges of racism. I would like to say thank you for the information that has come from the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. I am very much looking forward to having another conversation with them here very quickly. They represent members of our diverse culture in this province, and defining some of those priorities . . .

The Speaker: That concludes the time allotted for the minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is next.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and address this motion that has been brought forward by my friend from Edmonton-Meadows. First of all, I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Meadows for the work that he has done on the antiracism file ever since he was named to that position, after the 2019 election. It's a shame that, unfortunately, antiracism has been such a busy file in this province over the last year and a half. But I think my friend from Edmonton-Meadows has done a remarkable job of highlighting the work that needs to be done to create an antiracist Alberta.

I also want to address some of the comments that the minister for culture made in her remarks regarding this motion, because it's interesting to me that she highlighted the number of cultural events that she has participated in and the outreach that she has done to different ethnic groups. However, this motion specifically addresses the work of the antiracism council, and the minister only got around to mentioning the antiracism council at the very end of her speech, just shortly before her time expired, Mr. Speaker. Maybe some members would think that this is an oversight, that perhaps the minister was just caught up in the beauty of her own words and the fact that the antiracism council exists under her ministry just slipped her mind. However, if you actually look at the annual report for the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, you will find that even though this antiracism council is identified as a body that answers to the minister, it's only mentioned once in the entire report, and it says this:

The Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council has been tasked with addressing racial and multicultural barriers in Alberta. The council's Code of Conduct was approved by the Alberta Ethics Commissioner and will be developing and aligning the rest of its governance documents with the Code of Conduct.

Nothing else about the work that the antiracism council had done over the year 2019-2020.

Even more concerning, I think, to the people of Alberta is the fact that when you look at the financial statements for that ministry, you can't even find out how much money the government spent on the work of the antiracism council. It's one thing for the minister of culture to stand up and say what a good job she's doing to reach out to different ethnic communities in the province of Alberta, but it's notable that when it comes to actually doing the work of antiracism, there's only one line in her annual report and no budget commitment that is made publicly available. So it leads us to question whether or not she and the government are genuinely committed to doing the work of antiracism here in the province of Alberta.

I want to focus the rest of my time to making some comments regarding: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm its support for measures that identify and address racism in Alberta." In August I had the privilege of participating in a community forum

on racism that was held by a number of Franco-African groups that are housed in my community. During that discussion they raised a number of issues with respect to racism that that community faces, and I think it's my responsibility as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to bring them forward so that the government understands the impact of racism on that community.

Certainly, one of the impacts that racism has had on that community is the challenge – this all comes from an annual report that was provided to me by the hosts of this community forum on racism, and I appreciate them providing that to my office. They have identified challenges in finding employment. This has had social impacts, including poverty, prison, racial profiling, ostracism, ghettoization in some schools.

The Franco-African community faces double discrimination, Mr. Speaker, because they not only face linguistic barriers; they also face racial barriers. That creates a number of difficulties for members of the Franco-African community. They identified specific issues with respect to police and correctional services. They believe that racism is present within the police force, the RCMP, and the Correctional Service of Canada when it comes to recruiting people of African descent. They believe that they've been the victims of racial profiling. They're concerned about the lack of collaboration with community organizations, the lack of follow-up with various files regarding their relationship with victims' families. They've identified several passive consultation committees that simply exist by name and with no impact on the communities.

I know that I've raised this issue with respect to consultation with the Franco-African community in particular. I haven't yet received an update from the Minister of Justice's office on whether he will continue to reach out to the Franco-African community in my riding and across the province with respect to changes to the Police Act, and I would certainly appreciate hearing from the Justice minister whether or not he's structured some consultations with that.

I know that the minister of culture had approached me with respect to her concern that these consultations weren't being made in French, and I appreciate her concern about that. However, I would also refer members to the annual report of her ministry, which identifies that the Francophone Secretariat had a third of its budget left unspent last year. If the minister is so keen to make sure the francophone communities are involved in the consultations that this government is participating in, the least they can do is spend the money that is given to them to allow the government to consult with the francophone community in the language of that community's choice.

The community forum on racism identified some other things. The Human Rights Commission offers no bilingual documents to facilitate and encourage submission of complaints. The community has concerns about retaliation to protect black people who submit a complaint. They feel that this government, the provincial government, conducts racial profiling within some of its departments, and it singles out family services as one area where they have great concerns. And they identify that across government they feel that there is a significant lack of understanding of black peoples' realities.

Now, with respect to family services, I wrote to the minister of children and family services earlier this year to make sure that members of the Franco-African community are consulted with when it comes to discussing the work that has been ongoing. I was pleased to see that the minister did respond and said that she intended to engage with that community; however, I must stress that the community does not want a one-time engagement with children and family services. They want a permanent consultative structure created so that that community continues to have a voice at the table

when it comes to how that ministry conducts its work and interacts with the black francophone community.

The community forum on racism stressed the need to hire more bilingual workers, reinforced the need for young people to be able to see themselves in the community, and they stressed that government has an important role in hiring members of the Franco-African community to work in its ranks.

The community identified a number of problems within the education sector with respect to the francophone community. Certainly, they had concerns with the francophone school board's failure to hire an adequate number, in their view, of Franco-Africans as teachers, and certainly I think the government could play a significant role in making sure that there are enough Franco-African teachers in the school system, not least of which would include making sure that Campus Saint-Jean is a well-funded, well-functioning institution, instead of making the stakeholders of Campus Saint-Jean continually afraid that the cuts that this government is imposing upon the University of Alberta will lead to the closure of that institution.

5:30

They've highlighted racism in the francophone postsecondary institutions, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this was an issue on which I had a number of discussions when I was Minister of Advanced Education. The number of Franco-Africans who receive positions in faculty isn't on par with their general representation in the population, and I think postsecondary institutions need to do more to make sure that members of the Franco-African community are included in their ranks as well.

Mr. Speaker, I believe I have presented a number of concrete suggestions that this government can implement today to make sure that members of the Franco-African community are no longer discriminated against here in the province of Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General is standing.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the member for introducing Motion 512, with respect to the Anti-Racism Advisory Council. I do want to thank all members who have spoken on this particular issue because the blunt truth is that racism is real. It is something that affects all of us. I think that's something that all of us can agree on. Where we do disagree with the members opposite is on their approach to dealing with issues of racism. I do want to speak about this matter from personal experience because each and every one of us who has been impacted by racism has their own stories and experiences to tell.

But, Mr. Speaker, here we are again, another day and another shameless attempt by the NDP to needlessly politicize the issue of racism in this province. What the NDP is attempting to do is to take a mulligan on what they were reluctant to do when they were in government. They spent four years. Four years. I live in Edmonton. I closely monitored this political party. Each and every one of them – the cabinet ministers, all of their members from Edmonton – was the reason why I got involved in politics. They did nothing. They are quick at talking about issues of race and racism, but when it comes time to actually act, this province bestowed them with the unique opportunity, that they never had in our history, to finally work and take action on some of those things that I have been telling my community for ages.

Mr. Speaker, you know what happened? They did nothing, absolutely nothing. In true NDP form, we see an angry opposition party that has, quote, learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The NDP established an advisory agency, yet they didn't require that

agency to make public its recommendations. That advisory body was set up by the NDP without any requirement or mandate to make the recommendations public. Those are the facts, so we know exactly what we are dealing with with these members opposite.

The NDP knew at the time that not a single government of Alberta agency published their recommendations. They knew. We must impute to them that knowledge, and we must never allow them to get away with misrepresentations. They know that publishing an agency's recommendations would exceed the scope that the NDP set for their own committee. They know that. Mr. Speaker, this is just more shameless grandstanding by an angry NDP as they attempt to rewrite their own committee from the opposition benches. What they did not do when they had the power to do so they are now calling on us to do. However, I would ask that the NDP stop their ridiculous campaign of politicizing and exploiting racism to score cheap political points.

Albertans rejected their campaign of fear, division, and smear in 2019. They ran one of the nastiest, most divisive, unhinged campaigns in Canadian history, and Albertans overwhelmingly rejected that. Their campaign of fear and smear was so bad that one of their own failed candidates in Edmonton-South West called me a white supremacist. He had to apologize for calling me a white supremacist and for claiming that I support white supremacy. Their own candidate, the NDP candidate in South West. Their press office sent me an e-mail asking me to apologize for being a white supremacist. Mr. Speaker, this is the NDP before us today. That is the NDP that has called for Motion 512.

Now I want to take a moment to discuss my own experiences with racism in my country of birth, Nigeria, and here in this country, an amazing country. Mr. Speaker, I have said this several times. I was born and raised in southeast Nigeria of the tribe called the Igbo, who claimed their ancestry to the Jewish state from one of the sons of Jacob called Gad, you know, at a time when the Jews had been conquered, in the eighth century. The documented oral history of the Igbo said that Gad settled in southeast Nigeria, hence why the Igbo are called the wandering Jews of Africa. You will see, if you want to read a little bit more about that, that on February 4, 2013, they sent out a report. Take a look at it. It is there.

Mr. Speaker, because of that, we faced, the Igbo faced their own discriminatory racist practices in my country of birth, that culminated in a civil war, 1967 to 1970, that cost the lives of 3 million Igbo. The NDP will never tell me what it feels like to be discriminated against, what it feels like to have 3 million of your brothers and sisters murdered; 1.5 million of those were children who had to die as a consequence of what they called kwashiorkor, starvation, death by starvation.

Mr. Speaker, despite all of that, I came to this country. You know, when it was time for me to article – I have said this story before – it was difficult for me to get a job, to article, because I used to use my original name, Kelechi. It was not until I changed that name to Kaycee that I began to get responses back from law firms. Even the Minister of Justice, which I am today, did not get back to me at that point in time. My own wife interviewed at one of the biggest law firms in Edmonton, and they spent the one-hour interview asking her how come she speaks the Queen's English. Not one question on substantive law.

The NDP will never be able to tell me what it means to face racism and discrimination. I just want them, when they get the opportunity, to please act on it and stop talking about it for political gimmicks. Act on it. If you had done that in four years, I would be the first person to stand up on the floor of this particular House and raise my hands in support of Motion 512. You have not earned that support.

Mr. Speaker, despite all that we both have gone through, guess what? I sit here as the first black Canadian Minister of Justice. It did not happen during the NDP's four years. In a few weeks a lady by the name of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala will be named, hopefully, the first female African black director general of the World Trade Organization. She's also Igbo. The former secretary-general of the Commonwealth, Emeka Anyaoku, is also Igbo. Even Mayor Nenshi's former chief of staff, Chima Nkemdirim, is also Igbo.

5:40

So, Mr. Speaker, despite what the NDP has said, the government of Alberta takes the issue of racism very seriously, and we will show that not by talking about it but by delivering on the concerns that minority communities and our First Nations people have told us are discriminatory of them. Those are what we are going to focus on. We will take on those concerns, and we will deal with them, and we will not make them the subject of political football like the NDP did for four years. They had a committee that was supposed to look into carding for four years, 2016 to 2019. They had the report, they were told what needed to be done, and they did nothing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I reject the NDP's approach, and for that I caution against Motion 512.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to offer my comments on behalf of my constituents in southern Alberta in favour of the Member for Edmonton-Meadows' motion before this Legislature. The member has proposed that we assembled here today affirm our "support for measures that identify and address racism in Alberta" and, further, that we as private members urge the government of the day to "ensure that all recommendations of the Anti-Racism Advisory Council are publicly available in their original form" given that, as my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has enumerated, we have not heard much from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council. We know that they have undertaken very good work, and it is in the public interest for all Albertans to hear the results of that work directly from them.

The second piece of this motion is the piece that I like quite a bit because I'm a fan of deliverables and work plans, and that is that the government "lay before the Assembly a work plan for the implementation of the council's recommendations and provide regular updates on the progress of the work plan."

Now, it's worth going back to consider where some of this work came from and where the structure of the Anti-Racism Advisory Council and the funding that was attached to it came from. It was identified by the previous government, first of all, that the Legislature – certainly, there were private members involved in this – but also that Executive Council go out and have a series of broad-based conversations with community representatives. This occurred throughout 2017. It culminated in a report that was laid before the government that outlined a number of plans to take action against racism – I'll enumerate them in a moment; there were a number of specific actions to be taken – that the 25 members of the Anti-Racism Advisory Council undertake that work, such that it was a decentralized effort, Mr. Speaker, to hear from communities and have an iterative process on how to fight racism and how to be specifically antiracist.

It is not enough to simply affirm that there is no discrimination or have specific legal requirements for equality. One must be actively antiracist. If there is anything that we have learned, I would say – I know for myself personally and, I think, as a society – over

the last decade or two, it is that there are specific actions that must be taken in order to achieve that goal of substantive equality.

The 25 people were appointed to the Anti-Racism Advisory Council and tasked with a number of recommendations that came out of those broad-based consultations. Those proposed actions were creating a provincial hate crimes unit; funding the Alberta hate crimes committee; updating the school curriculum to include more material on fighting racism – well, I suppose we know where that one is at – expanding the number of languages students can learn core subjects in from eight to 10; expanding career mentorship programs to smaller cities, which would certainly be appreciated by my constituents; starting a foreign qualification fund that measures skills and work experience, not just credentials, and I will pause to recognize here that some form of credential work has been undertaken by this government since 2019, and I commend them for that and certainly spoke in favour of it; making it easier for people to have access to antiracism resources by creating a multilingual phone line; reflecting Alberta as a government by removing biases in hiring and training employees about indigenous awareness – again, we have seen some backwards movement with respect to people who work for the government of Alberta and their published racism and are encouraged to continue collecting a paycheck from the government of Alberta despite their published racism – making sure Albertans know their rights; and celebrating the province’s diversity.

The idea at the time was that there be \$2 million in initial grants being given out for specific projects and work that specifically target antiracist initiatives that are being undertaken at the level of grassroots engagement, Mr. Speaker. You know, at the time, just reading here the record of when the initiative was, after all of the consultations and after a report was prepared – I’m just looking at the photo here of a bunch of people crowded behind the then Minister of Community and Social Services, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. It’s kind of a jarring photo, looking at a photo of a bunch of people crowded together without masks on. That, of course, was a couple of years back. The folks who were part of those consultations: for example, we have Ahmed Abdulkadir, executive director of Edmonton’s Ogaden Somali Community of Alberta residents. He was one of the many people consulted. He had this to say: this is where the beauty of the advisory council comes in; the community will have a voice to advocate which direction the province should go and what needs to be implemented.

Well, that’s precisely, Mr. Speaker, why the antiracism council was empowered with the work that it was and the funds that it was. It was also recognized at the time that this was a first step. Ahmed Ali, an educator and Edmonton’s poet laureate at the time, said that the province is taking an important first step in antiracism actions.

It’s important to understand that we at the time understood it that way and had the humility to understand that we didn’t know everything, and that’s why we needed to make sure that this work was well informed by the advisory council, that there was a dialogue back and forth, and that there was actually an expectation of the expenditure of funds, the support of community groups, and an ongoing conversation with those that were elected.

Now, fast-forward to this, I guess, late spring, early summer, Mr. Speaker, to the Black Lives Matter protests and expressions of solidarity not only with what was going on in the United States but as a response to what is happening in this province and throughout Canada. We, too, had a national and a province-wide conversation about systemic racism, about the kinds of discrimination that exist and the sorts of action that we need to take with respect to employment, housing, justice system reform, racial profiling, the role of the Police Act in this province. Certainly, even at the level

of my community, you know, folks will come to me and talk to me about interactions at retail establishments.

5:50

I had one indigenous constituent who came to me shortly after the election who told me about the harassment that she was subjected to in a parking lot when she was going in to vote on election day because, you know, voting while indigenous earned her some approbation from folks in the parking lot and some intimidation for her audacity to exercise her franchise, that was hard fought and was not given to her in the early 20th century along with white women but came much later, showing for us, again, an instance of systemic racism that has existed in this country and in this province but also its modern-day manifestation. These are very simple things to ask the government to do: show us the work plan, show us the work. A government should do nothing less, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has approximately four minutes remaining prior to the Member for Edmonton-Meadows closing debate.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak against Motion 512, proposed by the opposition Member for Edmonton-Meadows. Sir, in June 2020 of this year the hon. Premier spoke to Motion 24, which was a provincial response to racism, and he stated:

There is an element in this discourse that says, “We don’t have racism,” and that basically seeks to deny it. I think that is a terrible mistake. It is a terrible mistake to deny the lived reality and the real experience of our friends, our neighbours, our co-workers, so many of whom can speak to the reality of racism, both explicit and implicit, in their lives.

I cannot agree more with the Premier. The reality is that racism is evident in our society, and we must act now to combat this.

On our side of the House we have some very diverse backgrounds: 13 languages are spoken on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, and many of us have experienced personally the challenges that come from having a different skin colour or speaking a different language. Alberta, though, is growing, and it is becoming more diverse: 1 in 5 are immigrants, and in Alberta here almost 1 in 4, 25 per cent, identifies as a visible minority, and we have about 300,000 that are indigenous. In order for Alberta to reach its full potential, we can’t be held back because of these racist attitudes, the lack of understanding, or the fear of change.

It is important to learn our stories, know our lessons, and work together as a society and move forward without things like racism weighing us down. We need to bring people together to share their experiences and build these relationships and promote this diversity that we so much want. This, sir, can take many forms, like chatting with our neighbours, going out for dinner with work colleagues, or having coffee with our children’s friends’ parents. I can certainly speak personally to the power that that connecting does. It’s through understanding, it’s through building relationships that we can overcome the issues of racism. It’s through understanding how people are and whatnot.

I can honestly say, Mr. Speaker, that I had to deal with such issues, and certainly as kids – we’ll have to just leave it at that, that they’re just children testing their boundaries, trying to deal with someone who looks different than everybody else. There’s said to be power in being accepted versus being able to throw someone else out under the bus, if you will, and getting the focus on them and their differences. Certainly, through elementary school, through junior high it was a different era. They were different times. There weren’t too many

Asians in Fort McMurray growing up. You know, admittedly, there wasn't equality. I was bullied by both Caucasian and indigenous people equally and had to deal with that threat of violence. Sometimes I was able to escape it; sometimes I was not. You learn to defend yourself pretty quick. That is just the way it is with children. Moving forward, I hope that we can come to an agreement that with racism, there is no place for that here in Alberta.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time is now 5:55, and that 55 minutes of debate has taken place. As such, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows. You have five minutes to close debate.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity once again. I recall that on June 6 in this House, when I put forward the motion that required public hearing consultation and the creation of the advisory panel to come back to the House before October 1 with the reports on it, the motion was defeated by the UCP members.

On Motion 24, I remember that my colleague from Calgary-McCall put forward an amendment that would ask the government to consult with racialized communities as part of the review of the Police Act and report back to the Assembly by October 1. It was further amended by the government members by deleting the date of October 1 from it. Since then we haven't heard anything about it. We're hearing a number of different consultations going on, consultation on gun owners, but unfortunately there's no information on what is happening on the antiracism framework.

On July 21 the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women talked about the creation of subgroups in the advisory council, but as of today we have not heard anything back, so what is the progress? On July 27 I asked the minister for her updates on her work with the advisory council and why the website of the advisory council is down, but still there's no answer to that. Even as of today the website of the advisory council is not updated.

Mr. Speaker, the UCP government has failed to effectively work with the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, and it's about 18 months, 19 months. The council reports to have met only twice. The council has not provided any resources.

If this motion is passed, this is an opportunity for the entire Assembly to hold the government to account and demand transparency and accountability on the important and necessary work of antiracism. Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve to know the work that the advisory council is undertaking and, more importantly, the recommendations that they're making to the government to ensure accountability on this very important issue. I would urge all members to support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 512 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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