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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 18, 2020

Day 67

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 18, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to her government and to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 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 interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

Edmonton Federal Building Living Wall

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, politicians are often accused of being out of touch, and while I know this stereotype is not reflective of many in the House, there is a reason why this perception exists amongst the public. Our late great former Premier Ralph Klein recognized this, coining the term "dome disease," describing the propensity of some members to become absorbed in the world of the Legislature and disconnected with the priorities of everyday Albertans.

Yesterday, thanks to our friends in the opposition, we were presented with a reminder of this. What I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker, is the Edmonton Federal Building's living wall. After receiving coverage in the press on the government's plan to remove the living wall, an extravagance that costs taxpayers \$70,000 a year to maintain, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford took to social media to lament the removal. Now, I, like the member opposite, spend time working in the Federal Building and appreciate the luxury of walking by the wall on a regular basis, taking advantage of the jungle-like humidity that emanates from it.

Our province is facing the most serious financial and economic challenges that we have seen for decades, and that means that luxuries for MLAs and staff must be taking a back seat to the priorities of Albertans. I know that the opposition will say that it's only \$70,000. Well, forgive me, but that is \$70,000 we can save. While I understand that the NDP don't prioritize fiscal responsibility, anyone who has experience in budgeting knows that the way to cut the fat is to cut away many excesses, even if they are relatively small, because those numbers add up to hundreds of millions across government.

I would also challenge any member of this House to tell me that they can look a constituent in the eye and tell them that they deserve a \$70,000 wall while Alberta families are coping with the current economic reality. For those on this side of the House, there is one answer: we can't. There is no justification. While members opposite lament the loss of government privileges and excess, I proudly tell my constituents that, in keeping with true conservative tradition, I support tearing down that wall. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will know that there's a long-standing tradition for members making members' statements to do so uninterrupted.

COVID-19 Response

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, there's been a string of tough polls for the Premier lately as Albertans realize just how badly he has

mismanaged the economy and provincial finances, but yesterday's was the most concerning of all. Almost two-thirds of Albertans are dissatisfied with this Premier's handling of the COVID pandemic response in Alberta. The Premier can compare that to his counterparts in every other province in Canada, where a majority of voters still believe that their Premier is doing a good job. In neighbouring B.C. a full 70 per cent still back their Premier's handling of the crisis, more than twice the level of support for the UCP in Alberta.

It's no surprise. This Premier has waged war on Alberta doctors throughout this pandemic. He's laid off hundreds of front-line nurses and more than 11,000 other front-line hospital workers. He's failed to produce a staffing strategy to support seniors' facilities, which has led to tragic results. He has failed to provide safe school re-entry plans for students, staff, and families in Alberta schools. He's failed to protect small businesses. He failed to protect workers with paid sick leave, even front-line health care workers. He's failed to get these basic things right.

We have known from the beginning that a second wave would come in the fall, yet here we are, with nowhere near enough contact tracers to warn Albertans of danger. This Premier has been sleepwalking into the second wave of this pandemic. He's offered Albertans no more than tired catchphrases like "up your game" and "knock it off." One day he preaches personal responsibility, and then the next day he dismisses COVID as only the 11th leading cause of death in Alberta. Well, I can tell the Premier that COVID is the leading cause of death at South Terrace continuing care, McKenzie Towne, and Manoir du Lac and the leading cause of a medical emergency in hospitals like the Royal Alex here in Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Job Creation

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we move forward with Alberta's economic recovery, it is increasingly important that we get Albertans back to work. Alberta's government is investing in projects around the province to create thousands of good-paying jobs and fuel prosperity for years to come.

Alberta's economic recovery was a priority before the pandemic and will continue to be. One of these critical projects, that was announced recently in my constituency, is the 65th Avenue interchange, which is a shovel-ready project that will expand development in the city of Leduc and the Edmonton International Airport and create over 470 new jobs during construction and thousands more once completed as a result of new investment in the region.

In addition to investing in infrastructure, we have also accelerated the job-creator tax cut to ensure that Alberta has the most business-friendly environment of any province to attract investment. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Bill 35 will be implementing the innovation employment grant, which will attract more investment in tech and innovation by targeting small and medium-sized businesses to increase their research and development right here in Alberta. This grant will support job creation by including labour as a primary component for qualification.

The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has been hard at work to continue diversifying all sectors in Alberta's economy. We are using \$280 million from TIER and the federal low-carbon economy leadership fund to help create 5,000 good-paying jobs in developing technology that ensures we continue to be leaders in emission reduction and a world-class energy sector.

The recent approval of the NOVA Gas Transmission line expansion is a key infrastructure project and is welcome news for many in the energy industry and will lead to more progress in our efforts to get Albertans back on track. This is another 2,900 direct construction jobs and a near \$1.2 billion increase to Alberta's GDP.

This year has been hard on everyone, but our government is working hard to ensure that Albertans get back to work and are able to support themselves and their families.

Thank you.

COVID-19 in Schools

Ms Hoffman: There are more than 300 Alberta schools with a COVID case according to Dr. Hinshaw. She says that COVID is growing exponentially in Alberta schools. Letters came home from more than 450 affected schools in just the last two weeks, and this government failed to hire enough contact tracers for the second wave. AHS has given up on contact tracing in schools and dumped the work onto school staff, who are already stretched to the breaking point. I'm hearing reports from parents waiting a week and a half to be informed of a confirmed case in their school community.

Thirteen hundred students and staff were sent home from Nelson Mandela school in Calgary earlier this week, and more than 6,000 students and staff have been sent into isolation at Calgary Catholic schools. The Education minister is too embarrassed by her failure to release a full provincial tally, but it's reasonable to assume that tens of thousands of Albertans are in isolation due to COVID cases in their schools.

Mr. Speaker, it did not have to be this way. Instead of spending \$4.7 billion on a failed corporate handout, the UCP government could have capped class sizes at 15 students. It's not rocket science. Smaller class sizes mean fewer contacts and fewer Albertans in turn in isolation. But maybe instead of hearing the warnings of the growing danger from Dr. Hinshaw, this minister is listening to the ignorant and reckless comments of her neighbour in Red Deer-South. He says that we're all being way too risk averse, too risk averse to a virus that's killed more than 430 Albertans.

Or maybe the minister is listening to the Premier, who says that COVID is only the 11th leading cause of death in Alberta and who says that more Albertans have died beyond their average life expectancy anyway. Those are disgraceful attitudes, Mr. Speaker. But it's not too late for the Education minister to do the right thing. She needs to step up, she needs to staff up, and she needs to spread out kids and cap class sizes at 15.

Victims of Crime Services Review

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, recently I was given the opportunity to co-chair the victims of crime review panel with the amazing MLA for Airdrie-East. The victims of crime review was created to uphold our platform commitment of conducting an immediate review of the current model of victim service delivery, victim assistance funding, and victim compensation, all to ensure that there is necessary assistance to the victims of crime.

The victims of crime funding in rural areas has not been updated since 2008, whereas larger municipalities' budgets were raised over the past five years and doubled to accommodate new requirements. Mr. Speaker, we have committed to fixing the problems identified by the Auditor General, and through intensive consultation we have clearly heard the areas that need to be addressed.

1:40

It was important, to gain this wide perspective, to include many departments, so we consulted with the departments of Justice,

Community and Social Services, Children's Services, Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, and Indigenous Relations, among others. Those consulted also include a huge cross-section of out-of-government groups, including volunteers, police-based victim services units, children's advocacy centres, sexual assault centres, women's shelters, and social support organizations such as the Mustard Seed, representatives from the Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association, law enforcement, social justice agencies, indigenous organizations, victims' advocacy groups, and municipalities.

Our government, with the help of some amazing individuals within the Ministry of Justice, is tackling the service delivery model and victim services programs to make them better. We will do everything possible to make these services more sustainable, consistent, and accessible to those who need it when they need it most. The individuals who work in victim service units and specialized service units are incredible. Crime doesn't necessarily happen between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. It happens at all hours. It is traumatic, often horrific, and with devastating outcomes. These men and women who answer the call quite literally make a huge difference, and we should thank them every day, so thank you.

Worker Safety and Bill 47

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, all the members of this House are supported by the same group of people, the workers in this province. They manufacture and serve our food, build our houses, bridges, and roads. They help us to heal when we are sick, stock our shelves, make our coffee, clean our offices, clear the snow off our roads, and haul away our trash.

We could not do what we do if not for the millions of workers in this province, which is why I am so very disappointed by the laughably titled ensuring safety bill, introduced in this House by the Minister of Labour and Immigration. How does limiting the work and participation of joint health and safety committees make workers safer? How does not requiring one at all construction sites, making Alberta the only jurisdiction to do this, ensure the safety of workers? How is safety improved by removing the responsibility of the employer to maintain a safe work site? All they have to do now is tell the worker about the hazards but do nothing to mitigate them. All they have to train workers about is how to use safety equipment but not make sure it is used. All of the responsibility for safety on a work site has been shifted from the employer to the worker. That doesn't look like balance to me.

I know that sounds like something from the past, like safety guidelines you might have heard in developing countries some 50 years ago, but good news for employers: our dangerous past is now our future. Thanks to this government, workers in this province can now look forward to more risks to their safety. The kicker, though: when workers are hurt, the UCP is also making it less likely they will be fully compensated, but that's for another day.

Albertans would do well to remember that the UCP government views their health and safety as red tape, and they should be worried about what shreds that are holding their lives together will be removed next.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has risen.

Rowan House Emergency Shelter in High River

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The impact of COVID-19 has been much more than just the virus. It has affected our society in many ways. One of the more devastating impacts of COVID-19 has

been the rise in domestic violence. Many people have lost their jobs and have had to make tough decisions regarding their household finances, which has caused extra stress between family members. This, in turn, has led to a rise in mental health issues and a higher rate of domestic violence. In fact, the RCMP have seen a 12 per cent rise in domestic violence calls from March to September this year compared to the same period last year.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind us all that November is Family Violence Prevention Month. It is more important than ever that we appreciate this month and that we work to educate ourselves and our friends and our family on how to best prevent domestic violence. On November 6 I had the pleasure of attending the 2020 Breakfast with the Guys, sponsored by Rowan House in High River. This was their third annual event, and it focused on the small things that men can do to make a big difference in the lives of the women and the girls that they know.

The Rowan House Society is an emergency shelter for women and their children. It started in a tiny, two-bedroom basement near Black Diamond, which could only house two women and their children, but a lot has changed since then. Now they have a 24-bed facility in High River to serve the needs of communities throughout Livingstone-Macleod. Over the years the organization has begun to offer family violence prevention, education, and intervention services to communities throughout my riding.

The rowan society grabs its name from the rowan tree, probably better known as the mountain ash, and it's a powerful symbol associated with peace and with sanctuary. Its berries are retained throughout the winter, which has made it a symbol of the endurance of life during the darkest times.

I would like to thank Rowan House and other similar organizations across Alberta and Canada for the work they do to prevent family violence. During this month of November I would like to encourage the members of this House, my constituents, and all Albertans across the province to do what they can to prevent family violence and to seek help if needed. If you or someone you know is personally dealing with family violence, please call 1.855.4HELPAB.

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

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta small-business owners have reached out to my office with dozens of questions, looking for clarity after last week's announcement. These owners aren't upset because there are new restrictions; they're upset because this government won't tell them why. For months small-business owners have been calling for a clear, evidence-based index so they can see what will cause a shutdown and plan accordingly. Instead, the Premier, without warning, announced new restrictions with no explanation as to how this will reduce the exponential growth of COVID-19 cases.

Ali from Possak Hampshire Academy of Irish Dance said: "We are just one of hundreds of dance studios in Alberta who have never had a single Covid case identified in our student population. We are not driving the spread. [Where's the data to] support shutting us down?"

On top of the confusion, the Premier is already closing small businesses for the second time with no new supports for small businesses or their staff. George Haralabakos, owner of World Bier Haus, points out, quote: "If you shut down, your expenses don't stop; they are continuous. The stress of closing down is probably the biggest weight I have on my shoulders because when you close, you lay off all your staff. How do they survive?"

The UCP needed to have supports for small businesses in place well before any business was forced to again. It is embarrassing that this Premier needs to be dragged kicking and screaming to do anything for Alberta small businesses. The owners and staff have worked hard to establish COVID-19 procedures to keep their patrons safe, and now they are being shut down again because of this government's mismanagement of the pandemic. The Premier needs to act now. Alberta small-business job creators and more Albertans will be out of work without any supports if they don't.

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

Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government was elected on a mandate to cut red tape by one-third. There are about 671,000 regulatory requirements. Our goal is to reduce one-third of those by spring of 2023. The result of the 2019 election shows a majority of Albertans agreed with our agenda to cut red tape.

I'm pleased with the progress our government has made since taking office. The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction recently tabled the first annual red tape reduction report, which highlights the progress our government has made. So far these efforts, led by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, have saved Albertans \$476 million. This is hundreds of millions of dollars that our children and grandchildren won't have to pay back.

Alberta's government has cut more than 6 per cent of red tape, saving job creators both time and money. Alberta performed three times better when compared to other jurisdictions like British Columbia and Manitoba in their first year of trying to reduce red tape. With Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2), our government will be even closer to our goal of reducing red tape by one-third.

The COVID-19 pandemic and depressed oil prices have created a terrible economic condition in Alberta. This is difficult for businesses to operate to create jobs and drive Alberta's economy forward. Reducing red tape through legislation such as Bill 48 will make Alberta the freest, fastest moving economy in North America.

The effort made by Alberta's government is not random. It is driven by the advice from key leaders in Alberta through panels. This includes small businesses, oil and gas, tourism, and hospitality. These efforts have received praise from our partners in the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and I'm proud of the red tape reduction efforts we have made and our continuing plan to save Albertans money.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Response

Ms Notley: Alberta is facing a devastating second wave. We have hundreds of outbreaks in our hospitals, our schools, and long-term care centres. Small businesses are struggling to stay open. Meanwhile the Health minister is waging war with doctors, nurses, and front-line health care workers, undermining their care at every turn. Alberta has gone from having one of the lowest case rates to being second only to Manitoba for skyrocketing active cases. Is this Health minister proud of his record?

1:50

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. You know, this is the typical response of the NDP throughout this pandemic, to create these conspiracy theories about doctors leaving or about nurses being fired. None of that is true. We're going to continue to make sure that AHS has all the resources that they need to be able to respond to the pandemic. We've invested in machines and equipment for us to make sure that we are leaders in our testing capacity. We're investing our workforce. We're investing in our continuing care operators to make sure that they are having the resources for PPE and to be able to clean and make sure that they're protecting their staff and residents, and we're going to continue to do that throughout the pandemic.

Ms Notley: Well, the numbers are in black and white notwithstanding what this minister says in this House.

Now, yesterday the Finance minister, in a galling display of hypocrisy, claimed that he cares about health care workers while at the same time confirming that in this province they must exhaust their sick pay, take at least a 60 per cent pay cut, or take no pay at all when they inevitably have to isolate over and over again due to exposure while being heroes. Meanwhile Albertans are paying full freight for the Premier's fourth week of self-isolation. Is anyone over there really surprised that Albertans think that this government's pandemic response is the worst in Canada?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, they obviously want Albertans to believe that, but the opposite is true. We've expanded our testing capacity. We're leaders in our testing capacity. We've been the most pro-mask government in Canada by distributing 40 million free masks throughout the pandemic to Albertans. We're making sure that we're going to continue to invest in AHS and their workforce capacity and their bed capacity and making sure that our continuing care operators are going to have the resources they need to continue to operate and respond to the needs of their staff and their residents. The exact opposite is true. Of course, the NDP are going to continue to cheer against Alberta and continue to undermine the credibility of all the tools that we're doing to respond to the pandemic.

Ms Notley: Yet still no guaranteed sick pay for our front-line heroes.

Now, Albertans wait days for test results; the Premier is on a special list. Health care heroes get no sick pay to cover their isolation; the Premier is on week 4 of this without losing a dime. It is no wonder that according to Leger Albertans are the most dissatisfied of all Canadians with their government's pandemic response, 59 per cent. Now, the minister claims, in this House anyway, that he's doing a good job. Albertans disagree. Mr. Speaker, over there, who's right? Albertans or this minister?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I think that was completely untrue, what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said. The part-time and full-time employees of AHS are going to have sick leave for them throughout the pandemic, and that's what's going to happen. That's what's in the collective agreement with their two unions for the front-line clinical staff. That's the case. Those are the facts. Of course, the NDP is going to continue with the strategy to continue to be untruthful to Albertans throughout the pandemic, to continue to undermine the credibility of our response to the pandemic, and to continue to attack the independence and credibility of our public health officials. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Ms Notley: What we're going to continue to do is remind this minister of the facts. [interjections]

Mask Policies

Ms Notley: Now, we must in the meantime do everything we can to prevent community spread, yet there are many communities with populations over 5,000 that are on AHS's hot list that do not have mandatory mask bylaws: north to south, everywhere from Medicine Hat to Cold Lake – Smoky Lake county has the highest per capita cases in the province – no mandatory masks. [interjections] Will the government take action to make sure that every community on AHS's hot list has mandatory masks in public spaces? Yes or no?

The Speaker: I usually have no problem hearing the question, but I did have a small challenge there.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the NDP in their members' statements were lauding the B.C. response to the pandemic, let me quote a column that was published by Dr. Bonnie Henry, the chief MOH under the B.C. NDP government, that was titled *Why B.C. Doesn't Have a Universal Mask Mandate*. In her words: "An order can never replace our personal commitment. We need to be responsible for our own actions – that is how we all pull together." Personal responsibility: her words, not mine, but, in fact, mine, too. The NDP here in Alberta can scream all they want, but they continue to prove themselves to be hypocrites throughout this pandemic.

Ms Notley: In B.C., Mr. Speaker, the rate of spread is half of what it is in Alberta. I wish we were doing as well as them.

Now, this government claims it's focusing on giving people freedom, but here's the thing: masks help stop the spread. It is the simplest way to protect the most vulnerable people in our communities. Stats show that a higher number of Albertans aged 60 years or more, those who are most vulnerable, live in rural and smaller communities. Masks prevent spread, which keeps them safe. Why won't you help those people and make masks mandatory in those hot-spot communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're making decisions here in Alberta based on data and the advice of the chief medical officer of health. That's what Albertans want, not polls and gutter politics. Now, there are two places in the world where we see public health officials being attacked by politicians. There's the unfortunate circumstance happening in the United States with Dr. Fauci, and then there's the Steve Bannon-level antics of the NDP here in Alberta against our public health officials. It's disgusting, it's appalling, and it's time for it to end.

Ms Notley: I wonder if the minister would describe his yelling at doctors on their driveways as a Steve Bannon attack on health care officials.

What we've seen is that when uncontrolled spread hits a small community like in Manitoba, an entire hospital and a community of 15,000 was so overwhelmed that nurses had to triage people in their cars. Meanwhile in continuing care centres in rural Alberta if there's an outbreak, they just won't have the staff to keep those seniors safe. Again, they're vulnerable. Why won't this minister

stand up for all citizens in smaller communities that still don't have mask bylaws?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to highlight again the \$170 million in additional money that we're providing to our continuing care operators. We're going to continue to make sure they have all the resources they need to protect the most vulnerable in the province. I quoted Dr. Henry. She reports to Minister Dix, the Minister of Health in B.C. I think Minister Dix is an example to the NDP across Canada, and it's too bad that the Alberta NDP learns nothing from him and continues to indulge in the lowest politics of division, to the extent of undermining our chief MOH here in Alberta and our response in Alberta to the pandemic.

COVID-19 Contact Tracing Apps

Ms Hoffman: The Minister of Health failed to hire anywhere near enough contact tracers for the second wave, and now we're completely overwhelmed, and we're falling further behind every day. The minister also failed to provide Albertans with a contact tracing app that works. His version has only traced 19 cases in six months. Mr. Speaker, there will be 19 more cases before this question period is done today. The national app may not be perfect, but it works. Why won't this minister give Albertans access to this life-saving app today?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to remind the NDP again that there's a difference between the two apps. The app here in Alberta is a contact tracing app. It's integrated into the contact tracing system here in Alberta. The federal app is an anonymous notification app. It doesn't relieve any pressures from our contact tracing system. I'll also remind the NDP that we continue to hire and invest in our workforce, in our contact tracing system. We're continuing to hire as many as we can and work with everyone from StatsCan as well as other partners to be able to provide us with the contact tracers that we're going to need throughout the remainder of the response to the pandemic.

Ms Hoffman: The UCP says that they like referendums, and Albertans have certainly voted with their thumbs and their phones. They don't want this minister's broken app. If he wants to tinker with it for another six months, that's his own business – feel free – but Albertans need help today. This minister can activate the national app today and make them both available. Why won't this minister let Albertans decide themselves which app works best for them?

Mr. Shandro: Again, more Steve Bannon-level antics from the NDP, Mr. Speaker. That was completely false. The app here in Alberta works. They don't want it to, and they don't want Albertans to know that it works, and they're undermining. Now, look, the app here in Alberta is a minor tool that we have in our response to the pandemic, but it is one of many tools, and they're undermining it. They're attacking our public health officials who worked on the app. They're attacking one of the tools that we have to respond to the pandemic. They continue to learn from the Bannon-level antics that are happening in the United States and attack our public health officials. It's disgusting and has to end.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: Less than 8 per cent of Alberta's adult population has downloaded this minister's app. Many of those Albertans deleted it when they saw how badly it worked. Many of us

downloaded the national COVID-19 alert app only to get a message that says: no reporting yet in your area. Mr. Speaker, this government should be doing every single thing they can to protect people from COVID and protect small businesses from lockdown. Minister, I've had the national app on my phone since you said we could use it in August. How long are you going to make us wait? This is ridiculous.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's appalling. It's a disgusting behaviour from the NDP to continue to attack the credibility of our tools that we're using in the pandemic. We are pulling out all stops to be able to reply to the pandemic. This is one of the minor tools that we have, but the app – again, I'll remind the hon. member that the apps are different. The federal app is not a contact tracing app. It's an anonymous notification app. The same concerns that the B.C. government also has – again, highlighting the difference between the B.C. NDP and their response to the pandemic and this behaviour, the strange, disgusting, behaviour of the Alberta NDP.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for her second set of questions.

COVID-19 in Schools

Ms Hoffman: This Premier has repeatedly encouraged those who aren't taking COVID seriously to, quote, knock it off. Well, it's clear; that message has not penetrated his UCP caucus. Yesterday the Member for Red Deer-South stated that there was too much risk aversion for COVID-19 in our schools. We also remember when the Member for Central Peace-Notley complained that students were washing their hands too much during the school day. This language shows a stunning lack of awareness for the risks of COVID-19. Does the Minister of Education support the dangerous statements that her colleagues are making or will she tell them to knock it off?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that because of the strong re-entry plan that we developed in conjunction with our health officials and our education partners, we have brought students back to school in a very safe manner. Right now, I can share with you that .13 per cent of students and staff have active cases of COVID-19, which, in fact, means that 99.87 per cent of all students and staff do not have COVID.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: The Member for Red Deer-South stated that a single case of COVID-19 in schools could force 118 students in isolation, and he makes a good point. The minister has not done the work to properly cap class sizes at 15 when we called on her to do so. Tens of thousands of students wouldn't have been in isolation if she did. However, this minister picked a \$4.7 billion corporate handout over the hiring of more teachers and custodians. Will this minister set her caucus straight, tell them to stop spreading misinformation and downplaying COVID, and will she step up and do her job and lead in this province? We desperately need her to.

Mr. Shandro: I'd like to just take a minute and talk about taking the pandemic seriously, Mr. Speaker. It was only last week in Red Deer when that member was attending a superspreader event. I mean, the hypocrisy of the NDP continues to be astounding. They

continue to be hypocrites. They continue to not follow the advice and undermine the credibility of our health officials. By the way, the re-entry plan in schools that the Education minister announced was with the advice of the public health officials throughout Alberta. We're going to continue to listen to their advice. It's too bad the NDP continue to undermine their credibility and continue to attack them. It's disgusting. It's got to end.

Ms Hoffman: What's disgusting is that the government keeps defending overcrowded hallways that are leading to COVID events in schools, Mr. Speaker. Instead of acting to make schools safer, government members are intent on spreading misinformation. Have any of you seen a high school hallway these days? It's dangerous. Even the Premier dismisses COVID as the 11th leading cause of death in Alberta. Minister, your actions and those of your colleagues show that you don't take COVID seriously. What will you do to smarten up, stop playing games, and actually protect students and staff in our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, we are bringing students back in a very safe manner, very low percentage of in-school transmission, and the opposition continues to double down on their failed plan that they had put forward where they wanted schools to either be shut down or only at half capacity. We know that it would take an additional 13,000 teachers to reduce class sizes to 15. We have students back in school, learning in a safe environment, and we appreciate all that our teachers are doing out there.

Thank you.

Fair Deal Panel Report

Mr. Loewen: Albertans have been growing restless on the progress on recommendations arising from the Fair Deal Panel. It is understandable that as government works on these issues, people do not see the progress they would like and sometimes accuse the government of being all talk and no action. Albertans are more than tired of Ottawa's lack of understanding of our Alberta way of life and what Alberta adds to the Canadian economy. We've even just recently heard the musings of the Prime Minister, using the pandemic as a, quote, reset. That doesn't sound positive to Albertans. One of the greatest concerns is the inequality of transfer payments. When will Albertans see progress on a referendum on transfer payments?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that important question. We campaigned across this province to enhance the ability of Albertans to participate in direct democracy. The Justice Statutes Amendment Act is currently before this Assembly, and it provides the framework for referendums to be conducted alongside municipal elections. This is an important piece of legislation, and I trust all members of this Assembly will support this bill to provide all Albertans with the ability to participate in direct democracy.

Mr. Loewen: Given that other items discussed by the Fair Deal Panel include recall legislation, citizen-initiated referendums, Alberta collecting its own taxes, an Alberta constitution, and an Alberta pension plan and given that it appears that there could be huge savings for Albertans by having their own pension plan, where

is the government at in analyzing the benefits of an Alberta pension plan?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that an Alberta pension plan has great promise to reduce costs for both employers and employees in Alberta. But it is a complex issue, and it deserves further study. We will be awarding a contractor very soon, an expert contractor, to provide us a full report on the opportunities, risks, and logistics of an Alberta pension plan.

Mr. Loewen: Given that it seems that the Liberal government in Ottawa is out of touch with the needs and concerns of Albertans and given that rural crime and, in fact, crime across Alberta is a huge issue and given that we had a town hall last night on Trudeau's gun ban and many questions were asked about the appointment of an Alberta CFO and given that the topic of an Alberta provincial police force also came up at that town hall, where are we at with the study into the opportunity to have a provincial police force, and what progress have we made on appointing an Alberta CFO?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Central Peace-Notley. You know, I am pleased to report that a chief firearms officer implementation team is hard at work setting up a provincial CFO office. I would expect that Alberta will be appointing our own provincial chief firearms officer in 2021. PricewaterhouseCoopers has been retained to do a deep study into the question of an Alberta provincial police service. When they complete and deliver their report, I will encourage the member at that point in time to get back to me for a follow-up.

Provincial Fiscal Policies and Financial Reporting

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, the record of this Finance minister is an abject failure. He doubled the deficit before the pandemic. In 2019 he hiked income taxes, property taxes, school fees, insurance premiums, and did so much more to make life worse for Albertans. All the while he gleefully handed out \$4.7 billion to profitable corporations, which resulted in 50,000 jobs lost. To the minister: how can Albertans ever trust a thing you do given your failed track record to date?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is now facing, under the watch of this government, the largest global contraction in the economy in the last hundred years, the largest collapse in energy prices in modern history, and a pandemic within our borders. In spite of that we brought in a recovery plan that is working. While there are hard days ahead, we've already recovered almost 260,000 jobs to date, and we are not done. Compare that to the NDP record, who did not face those great challenges yet failed miserably.

Mr. Bilous: Under the NDP in 2018 we led the country in GDP growth.

Given that a competent Finance minister would not have lost \$1.6 billion and then call his audit report clean and given that in the private sector this massive, egregious, embarrassing loss would result in immediate termination, yet this minister thinks it's not unusual to lose \$1.6 billion, to the minister – and I'm asking sincerely – don't you think it's time to give the books to someone else?

2:10

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That question just, again, depicts the financial illiteracy and incompetence of the members opposite. The reality is that we did receive a clean, unqualified audit report from the Auditor General. For the members opposite, that means that there is no money missing. Funds are not missing, and funds are fully accounted for. It is normal course of business to make year-end adjustments and consultation, and at the advice of an external auditor that's what happened.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister refuses to bring on someone capable of doing the job and given that his record is marked by higher costs on families, fewer jobs, a declining economy, and he lost \$1.6 billion – and he brushes it off like he's dropped change in the couch cushions – to the minister: since you can't be trusted with taxpayers' money, will you commit to coming before Public Accounts to answer for your failed jobs record and your role in what is the worst audit report I've ever seen?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that is so false, it's laughable. That is the reality. I compare our record in the most challenging economic time in a century versus the record of the NDP during normal course. Our record comes out much more positive. Moreover, we've implemented an economic recovery plan that will result in thousands of jobs for Albertans looking for a job. It will result in key infrastructure that will attract investment and create long-term job opportunities and wealth creation for the province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Provincial Loan Guarantee to TC Energy

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, in March the Premier announced that Albertans were giving a \$6 billion loan guarantee to TC Energy for the Keystone XL project. The Premier said that the loan guarantee wouldn't come into effect until the 2021 construction season, giving the government time to assess in late January if Mr. Biden won the election. But according to the Auditor General's report the loan guarantee comes into effect on January 1, 2021. Can the Energy minister please clarify for the record: when does the loan guarantee come into effect?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, details around Keystone have been talked about in great detail, and if the hon. member would like to learn more, she's welcome to contact the Department of Energy at any time to find out those details. What we really see here that's going on is that that member, of course, is part of a party that has aligned themselves with organizations like Extinction Rebellion and Ecojustice, that have dedicated their time to being able to prevent pipelines from being built. We're working closely with our allies within the United States as well as with the Canadian government to be able to advance our pipeline interests. This government will continue to do that, will continue to stand up for our largest industry, unlike that member who was part of a government that dedicated their time to making sure pipelines could not get built.

Ms Ganley: Given that that government lost \$1.6 billion and apparently ministers of it don't know when they're spending \$6 billion or not and given that the Auditor General pointed out that the Premier gave Albertans the wrong information and given that

the loan guarantee actually takes effect on January 1, before the president-elect is sworn in, and given that the Premier tries to claim that the \$6 billion loan guarantee isn't a risk, to the minister: how did you get this critical date wrong, and exactly how much are Albertans on the hook for on January 1?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what our government and the Energy minister got right one hundred per cent is standing up for the oil industry and for the oil and gas industry in this province and working to get pipelines to be able to get our product to market. What that member and the leader of her party, the Leader of the Official Opposition and the former Premier, got wrong is protesting and fighting against pipelines inside this province. They've protested against Northern Gateway. They protested against Energy East. They had protested against Keystone. They spent their time both in government and out of government trying to stop our largest industry from being able to succeed. This government is committed to standing up for our largest industry and making sure that Alberta can succeed now and for generations to come.

Ms Ganley: Given that apparently that member can't find \$6 billion and given that the Keystone XL project faced significant political and legal risk before the deal was even signed and given that the Premier ignored the risk while placing a \$7.5 billion bet on Donald Trump winning the White House and given that the risk has increased exponentially with the president-elect promising to cancel Keystone, will the government finally fess up and release the details of the Keystone XL deal so Albertans can assess the risk for themselves?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, there's the NDP again betting against pipelines. Now, that's a change because, actually, Keystone was brought to this House by this government, a motion in support of the Keystone plan that is being undertaken by this government, and it was unanimously passed by this Chamber, including with support from that member's party. It seems that, again, you don't know which way the NDP is going to go with pipelines. Sometimes they like to pretend like they're pro oil and gas, and in that moment they stood up for Keystone and helped this Legislature pass a unanimous motion in support of Keystone, but now they're back to where they were before, and that is protesting against pipelines and betting against Alberta's future. We will not do that.

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

COVID-19 Contact Tracing Apps (continued)

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans are familiar with Alberta's contact tracing mobile application, ABTraceTogether. ABTraceTogether was designed to help Albertans through this challenging pandemic by notifying them if they've been exposed to COVID-19 and giving them the opportunity to safely report exposure. While Alberta's government continues to focus on adoption and enhancement of their mobile tracing app, the federal government has been perceived to be pressuring Alberta to transition to the app they created. Can the Minister of Health share with Albertans why ABTraceTogether will continue to be the superior mobile application for Albertans versus the one developed by the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not a political issue. It's not provincial versus federal; it's about providing Albertans with

the best tools available to fight the pandemic. ABTraceTogether is one of those tools. It works. It's directly integrated into our contact tracing system. The federal app is a notification app, and it provides no details of how or when an exposure might have happened. Now, COVID Alert does not ease the burden of our system. It drives up unnecessary testing and unnecessary self-isolation. We're sticking with ABTraceTogether because it's a contact tracing app. It's been successfully used in Singapore and throughout the rest of the world, and we'll continue to use all . . .

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given security concerns around mobile applications and the potential for abuse by those with less than noble intentions and given the risks of this information being maliciously manipulated, to the same minister: what is this government doing to ensure that information captured and processed through this app is not vulnerable to hacking or mischievous abuse?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. Protecting Albertans' privacy is paramount. Users opt in and must consent to sharing data after a positive test result. Data is then stored on the user's phone in an encrypted form, and it's deleted every 21 days. Data will not be accessed unless users consent to sharing their data with Alberta Health Services. The only information exchanged between users' phones is a random ID, nothing that's identifiable. ABTraceTogether does not use your phone's GPS, it does not track your location, and it does not use your contacts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta seniors are most vulnerable to the dangers of COVID-19 transmission and given that many seniors are not as conversant with mobile device use as other demographics and given that members on this side of the House are supportive of our provincial contact tracing team and their valiant efforts, can the Minister of Health please explain how the government is encouraging use of the app amongst Alberta seniors and how they will benefit from ABTraceTogether in both protecting health and enhancing quality of life?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we know that seniors are at the highest risk of getting COVID. I encourage them, like all Albertans, to use ABTraceTogether. The app augments the work of our contact tracers, as I said. It doesn't prevent COVID, and it is not a substitute for other precautions. Seniors in particular must follow public health guidance, along with all Albertans, to ensure that our most vulnerable are kept safe. The app helps Albertans to protect themselves and their loved ones by increasing the ability of public health officials to identify people who may have been in close contact with a COVID-19 case.

Provincial Parks

Mr. Schmidt: Last night the environment minister took part in a town hall on parks that could only be charitably described as a disaster. The chat was shut down, questions were deleted, and the minister himself ignored the hundreds of questions from the public who asked about the UCP's plan to sell and close hundreds of parks and chose instead to only take questions from his fellow MLAs. I'm

sure his little brother asked him some really tough questions. Minister, why did you hold a public town hall but then take more questions from your baby brother than the public?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, he's my little brother, not my big brother, but that's semantics.

That is completely and utterly false, just like we see with the NDP when it comes to this issue. Their party continues to make things up. There were two chat channels into that town hall. At the beginning of that town hall it was made clear that the comments were going to go through one chat channel. One was shut; the rest was open, Mr. Speaker. My MLA colleagues who invited me to that town hall asked me questions that they were receiving through the thread and had received from their constituents. Happy to keep doing that. And I was excited today to see hundreds of e-mails coming in to me saying that they're happy to get the facts straight when it comes to parks, not the false facts being presented by that member.

2:20

Mr. Schmidt: I'm sure his fellow MLAs are happy to write him hundreds of e-mails to make up that number.

Given that when asked about how people who couldn't afford user fees would be able to access parks, the minister told them to go somewhere else and instead talked about the fiscal situation, given that we've received thousands of letters calling on the UCP to dump their plan to impose fees and sell off parks and given that Albertans who can't afford user fees have nowhere else to go, to the minister. Our parks belong to everyone. If you don't get that, should you really be in charge of them?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member continues to make things up. It's very disappointing. What I did say last night is that our parks system has a variety of different services that come at different prices, and there are opportunities throughout the system all across the province. And, yes, we are going to make sure that we have a viable system for generations to come. Unfortunately, that member was part of a government that quadrupled the size of parks but put no investment into it at all. We will do what we need to do to make sure we have a parks system that Albertans can enjoy now and can enjoy for generations to come. We will not allow that member and his allies to continue to make things up. We'll always tell the truth. I know he doesn't like that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his second supplemental, with no preamble, I might add.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this minister also claimed at his faux town hall that they consulted extensively during the election on parks in their platform and given that I've read their platform and there's not a single mention of the UCP's plan to sell or close 164 parks and given that Albertans are right to be angry at this UCP government, who didn't campaign for, consult on, or even breathe a single word of their plan to devastate provincial parks during the election, Minister, you claim that you campaigned on selling parks; your platform says that you did not. Why did you hide this plan to carve up our beautiful parks and sell them off to the highest bidder?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, not one park in this province is being sold. Not one. That member – I'm going to have to withdraw this in a moment – is a liar. Happy to apologize and withdraw.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and Government House Leader, I appreciate the withdrawal.

I don't think the intentional breaking of the rules is appreciated. Hon. Official Opposition House Leader, there is no need to be on your feet while I'm dealing with a point of order. I appreciate the withdrawal. I would expect that you conduct yourself in a way that would be more appropriate in the future.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Municipal Funding

Member Ceci: Thank you. The Minister of Municipal Affairs put communities on notice: more giant cuts are on the way. This from a government that already downloaded costs for industry, for policing, and services onto rural taxpayers. Families are already struggling. Jobs are being lost. [interjections] Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't hear myself because of the interruptions.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I am the one that gets to determine what's loud and what isn't. You have 15 seconds remaining. If you don't like people making noise, perhaps you might not in the future.

Member Ceci: All right. Families are struggling. Jobs are being lost. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: can you tell me what you're saying to families who could lose their homes, who can't pay the bills, when your central strategy is more downloading and higher property taxes? Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. There is no doubt that Albertans are going through a tough time right now. That is why this government is doing everything within our power to make sure that we rebuild our economy and assure families that this government is going to be there with them every step of the way.

Mr. Speaker, what is important to point out is that the reason why Alberta has suffered more than it should at this point in time is because of the disastrous record of the members opposite. They ran our economy under the ground and saddled us with multibillion dollars in debt and deficit. On this side of the aisle we're working harder to solve those problems.

Member Ceci: Given that far too many Albertans are already struggling to pay the bills, with the first round of mortgage foreclosures just around the corner, and given that this UCP government is proposing further cuts to municipalities, forcing them to raise property taxes, and given that this former minister has made a mess of the linear assessment changes, asking regular homeowners to pay for more while getting less, and given that this government has given \$4.7 billion for wealthy foreign shareholders but asks municipal ratepayers to pay more, to the minister: why is your government making it harder for Albertans to keep their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans understand that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you know, took a province that had a combined debt of \$12.9 billion and took it to \$70 billion. It is rich coming from the members opposite that they are talking about how to make sure that we live within our means. The blunt truth is that the members opposite nearly destroyed our economy, and we are working so hard to dig ourselves out of their mess.

Member Ceci: Given that there are more cuts on the way for municipalities at the expense of ratepayers and given that jobs are being lost but this government has decided to cut rural economic

development alliances and given that increased taxes on homeowners coupled with cuts to jobs and the economic development is a recipe for more mortgages going into foreclosure and given that the family home is the bedrock of our communities and should be the centre of government decision-making, to the minister: when will you give families and homeowners a break and abandon your plan to ratchet up property taxes on Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when this pandemic hit, one of the first steps we took was to put in place all kinds of relief to families and businesses. I think what is important again to note is that we are working so hard to make sure that we deal with the underlying root cause that the members opposite left for us. The families across Alberta can rest assured that this government is doing everything within our power to rebuild our economy and make sure that we protect lives and livelihoods.

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

Provincial Parks (continued)

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition and several special-interest groups have been spreading fear and misinformation about Alberta's parks. Last night I hosted a successful town hall, where we were able to put many of these concerns to rest. One of the most common misstatements of facts is around 164 sites that Alberta's government is looking for operational partnerships for with nonprofits, First Nations, recreation clubs, and other organizations. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: can you please inform the public of your plans for these sites?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the plans for these sites are simple. They remain fully funded in the province of Alberta, fully protected within Alberta Environment and Parks and underneath the provincial park system. That's the fact. I know, unfortunately, that the NDP and their close extreme environmental organization allies like to make things up when it comes to that, but not one of those sites will be sold. They will continue to be operated by the government. Yes, we do work with our nonprofit park societies, that we campaigned on to do. Unlike the NDP, we trust Albertans to help manage their own backyard. They think only union employees and their close allies like Gil McGowan can manage our park system. We know that Albertans know how to handle it.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you. Given that one of the other concerns some of my constituents have expressed to me is that some of the incredibly beautiful landscapes that Albertans, especially Calgarians, love in Kananaskis Country and the eastern slopes will be subject to industrial development and given that industrial development poses real questions over the potential for severe environmental degradation in these beautiful natural environments, to the same minister: can you please explain to the public why they should not be concerned about industrial development in these areas?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it was ridiculous to watch the NDP over and over say that there could be industrial development in Kananaskis. As you know, because I've told you in this Chamber many times, the Kananaskis policy that was signed by Ralph Klein in the middle of the '90s still remains in place. This government

remains committed to it. It prevents any industrial development within the Kananaskis area, and it certainly protects the landscapes, both public land in Kananaskis and parkland in Kananaskis, from being sold. This again is just another example of the NDP making it up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Issik: Thank you. Given that the minister has repeatedly gone on record, including in this very Chamber just now, and reassured Albertans that parks and ecologically and recreationally significant land across the province will not be sold and given that this was communicated once again in our virtual town hall meeting last night and just now in the Chamber, I ask the same minister: why, then, did our government recently sell a quarter section of pasture land near Taber in the southeast region of Alberta?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government does buy and sell agriculture land all across the province. That's different than parkland. In relation to that quarter section in Taber, let me be clear. That was approved by the then NDP government and by the then environment minister after a full environmental assessment that determined that there was not endangered grassland in that area and that quarter was better off for agriculture work, and then the proceeds from that sale go to the land stewardship fund to buy habitat for millions of dollars across this province to protect areas like that. To be clear, that quarter section was approved to be sold by the NDP.

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

2:30

Anti-Racism Advisory Council

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I brought forward a simple motion, a motion to call on the UCP to give the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council the tools and framework they need to succeed by ensuring that recommendations from the council are public, that they have a public work plan so that all Albertans can access the work they are doing and be confident the action is being taken. Unfortunately, the UCP voted against this. To the minister of multiculturalism: why shouldn't the council have tools and frames it needs to succeed? Why do you continue to ignore this important group?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The motion brought forward by the member opposite would have gone beyond the mandate of the advisory council, a mandate that was defined under the previous government. It would entail broader changes to the governance of all government agencies. Our government's guidelines are the same protocols that the former NDP government followed when they established the council. Now, this does beg the question: why did the NDP put this forward, a motion that goes against the principles they established when they were in power, and why are they calling for this change now, when they had the opportunity to do so before Albertans decided their time in office was up?

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, given that this council has only met twice while the UCP has been in government and that their ability to work has been blocked by bureaucratic process and given that it's becoming clear that we must do more than promote multiculturalism, that we must pursue antiracism measures, and given that the members of this council are best placed to assist the minister

in the creation of antiracism policies that will improve the lives of all Albertans, to the same minister: why aren't you making it easier for the council to do their work?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government knows how important it is to address racism here in our province. The minister of culture and multiculturalism has taken steps to engage with cultural groups right across the province and learn from them about the challenges they face. We have built up strong momentum and will continue to explore new strategies based on these recommendations from the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. At the end of the day, all Albertans need to be involved to make lasting change.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, given that the council wanted to release a statement in the midst of growing Black Lives Matter protests in response to the death of George Floyd but given that the red tape they encountered prevented that from happening and given that my motion would support accountability and transparency in the important work tasked to these members, to the minister: do you think censoring this council is wrong, and what will you do to ensure it does not happen again?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, the minister of culture and multiculturalism has taken a number of steps to engage with communities and groups right across this province to learn about the challenges they face. We have built up strong momentum, and it is absolutely based on the recommendations that have come forward from the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. All of our strategies focus on engaging, educating, and inspiring Albertans and removing barriers so we can all be involved in building a better and more inclusive province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has a question.

Human Rights Initiatives

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week federal, provincial, and territorial ministers met to discuss Canada's international human rights obligation. It was a chance for ministers across the country to discuss their priorities and current issues. Well, except for Quebec and Alberta. They chose to stay at home doing nothing instead. To the minister: why was Alberta not an active participant in this meeting? Were you too busy to care about human rights?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This government no doubt values the fundamental principles of human rights. Alberta participated in that particular conference with the feds and other provinces. Once again, this is another NDP, you know, divisive tactic. My department participated in that particular conference, and that's what the member needs to know.

Mr. Sabir: Given that civil society groups are speaking out about the failure of Alberta to participate in the meeting and given that it has been suggested that the reason for Alberta's nonparticipation is that this government doesn't believe it is bound by international human rights obligations, to the minister: are human rights a

priority for this government? Do you understand the government's obligation in international human rights?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here we go again with a divisive, angry NDP. That's all they know how to do. You know, again, my department participated fully in that particular conference, but here we are. All that the NDP does is look for opportunities to divide Albertans, to create fear and smear. But the good news is that the people of this great province are seeing the NDP for what they are, and they would not allow them to divide us.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the agenda for the meeting focused on human rights, dimensions of COVID-19, and diversity, inclusion, and antiracism and given that just yesterday this government voted down a motion by my colleague from Edmonton-Meadows calling for Alberta's antiracism council recommendations to be made public, to the minister: does this government not consider racism an issue in our province? Just tell us one specific thing that you have done about human rights, about racism since you've been in this office, just one thing.

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, we have done more in 17 months than the NDP did in the four years that they were in charge of our province. You know what? The people from the black community approached the NDP from 2016 to 2019 to complain about a particular practice that they see as a violation of their human rights. The NDP commissioned a study, a report. They sat on it for three years. You know, the NDP are all talk but no action, and I will not let them get away with that.

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: My big brother.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thanks, little brother.

Provincial Financial Reporting

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently we heard from the Auditor General about a number of energy-related accounting errors. I've had constituents reach out to me about this, and many have asked about what they've been hearing from the opposition, social media, and in the news; namely, about the \$1.5 billion that's not accounted for. I'm wondering if the minister can clear this up for me and my constituents.

An Hon. Member: Zing.

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Let me be absolutely clear: there is no money missing, and all funds are adequately and appropriately accounted for. The Auditor General gave the province a clean, unqualified audit report for the province's 2020 annual financial statements. An independent auditor such as the Auditor General provides real value and assistance in determining appropriate reporting and disclosure for complex accounting issues. That's what happened here.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the reply. Given that the Auditor General is a respected arm's-length institution and given that the Auditor General's annual

audits are routine, fair, impartial, and a key component in our government's commitment to transparency and given that the former NDP government was also audited at length by the Auditor General, to the same minister: how is this year's audit any different from audits done during the previous government? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. You have lots of time to heckle. The Speaker is on his feet. That is not one of them, to be clear.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a normal year-end audit function, and adjustments are not uncommon. In fact, in 2017, when the members opposite were governing, the Auditor made adjustments of nearly \$2 billion to ensure appropriate treatment of the Balancing Pool. In fact, the larger adjustments this year stem from irresponsibly managed issues that we inherited from the NDP, including their failed crude-by-rail policy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP's fiscal record is not exactly an example that I'd like to aspire to and given that this government champions cutting red tape, adopting best practices and corporate processes and given that the Auditor General's report highlights the importance of adhering to corporate processes and the best practices for financial reporting, to the same minister: how is this government improving and implementing best practices for financial reporting?

2:40

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. Responsible financial management and ensuring our government is following public-sector accounting principles is critically important. For the 2019 year-end financial statements, we implemented all of the Auditor General's recommended adjustments. Our government has also taken larger actions to improve overall processes, including legislating a fixed budget period. With a fixed budget period there is greater transparency and stability and accountability in government reporting.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Schow: For a moment there I was in the wrong chair, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill 206, Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, sponsored by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. The bill was referred to the committee on October 28, 2020. The committee's final report contains two recommendations. First, the committee recommends that the chair write a letter to the current sponsor of Bill 206 recommending that he seek unanimous consent to change the sponsorship of Bill 206. Mr. Speaker, the report also recommends that Bill 206 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 206.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 206, Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? If so, please rise.

Seeing none, the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has requested concurrence in the report for Bill 206, Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Introduction of Bills

Bill 207

Reservists' Recognition Day Act

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 207, Reservists' Recognition Day Act.

This is to show appreciation to the thousands of reservists across the province who have helped locally within the province and defended Canada internationally and to recognize the hard work that they have done.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope this is the appropriate time. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of the Northern Alberta Development Council 2019-20 annual report as required in section 8 of the Northern Alberta Development Council Act.

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 hon. Mr. Dreeshen, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, pursuant to the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council annual report 2019-20.

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Thank you. I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 36

Geothermal Resource Development Act

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to this bill, Bill 36, the geothermal energy bill. I think I will preface my comments by

saying that when we were in government, we worked with our oil and gas industry to address the issues facing our oil and gas industry, in particular takeaway capacity, and we worked and focused singularly on getting the pipeline built, TMX, and that pipeline is progressing. With that, we knew all along that we need to diversify our economy, and we did put a lot of effort into starting programs that will help us diversify our economy, create jobs, bring investment.

Some of those programs actually were working fairly well. For instance, we started investor tax credits so that new investment can come in and we can diversify our economy. We invested in wind and solar energy projects so that we can get our economy going, get our economy diversified. Then we invested in petrochemical diversification programs: phase 1, phase 2. Those programs not only were able to attract new investment, not only were able to create new jobs; they were helping us diversify our economy as well.

Geothermal energy is certainly one area where Alberta can be a leader. We can have a framework in place, a strategy in place that can help us improve and develop this area and create jobs and bring investments. We have been calling for these initiatives. Unfortunately, the government, when they took office, cancelled almost \$1.6 billion in different diversification programs.

Mr. Chair, I was at the chamber event not long ago, I believe in February or March, where the government's Minister of Finance was addressing the chamber, and on the question of diversification the minister said – and I'm pretty much paraphrasing – that diversification is a long-term luxury. That was just six months ago. Instead, what the minister focused on, what this government focused on was their \$4.7 billion corporate handout.

2:50

Even in that room, even in Calgary, where we have seen higher unemployment, where we have seen businesses leaving, where we have seen investment fleeing from there, where we are seeing a 30 per cent vacancy rate in Calgary downtown towers, people wanted to hear something about diversification. There were many entrepreneurs, businesspeople sitting in that audience that were looking for some direction from the minister about government supports, government willingness to support the diversification of the industry, but the government message was that they want to get out of the economy and that they don't want to pick winners and losers and that diversification is a long-term luxury.

Now all of a sudden the government has a change of heart, and they want to talk about diversification. It's still a good thing, but the government doesn't have any credibility whatsoever on this file because for the first more than a year the government's only strategy to address issues facing our economy was that \$4.7 billion corporate handout. That was the government's only strategy. They assured Albertans that it will create jobs. That was the only strategy, the government said, that will bring investments. We didn't see that happening anywhere across this province.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

If I talk specifically about Calgary, after that policy was announced, after the government even assured businesses that they would expedite rolling out of that policy, the practical result in Calgary is that we are still seeing job losses. We are still seeing investment fleeing the province. We are still seeing businesses laying off people in Calgary. We saw EnCana benefiting from this policy, \$53 million or something around that. Not only were there layoffs; they just moved down to the United States, changed their name, and Albertans didn't see any prosperity, any jobs, any investment coming out of that investment. Then we saw TC Energy also benefiting from this policy of a \$4.7 billion handout. They didn't

create jobs. They didn't add to their capital budget. Instead, there were layoffs, and there were reductions in capital budgets.

Suncor: they received over a billion dollars from that policy, and again we didn't see jobs coming to Calgary. We didn't see investment coming to Calgary. Instead, they're planning on laying off 15 to 20 per cent of their workforce, mostly from Calgary. Instead, we are seeing reductions in capital budgets of these companies.

Then, the last we heard, there was a merger between Cenovus and Husky. Both of these companies have benefited from the government policy of handing out \$4.7 billion and assuring Albertans that it will create jobs and it will bring back investment. Guess what? On that merger the UCP Minister of Energy was telling us in this House that it's a good thing, that it shows the strength of the economy, and all those kinds of things, which I don't think any economist will agree with. I personally have a background in economics, and I cannot think of a way where a merger in the middle of a recession will be an indicator of the strength of the economy. Anyway, that deal may be good for the shareholders of Cenovus and Husky; they all may benefit. The Cenovus and Husky executives: they may benefit. But what's in that deal for Albertans, that Albertans paid for in terms of that reduction of \$4.7 billion? What Albertans are getting in return are almost 2,000 layoffs.

Around that background, when all that was happening, the government thought that cutting all the diversification programs that our government started was the right thing, and up until six months ago they were saying that diversification is a long-term luxury. But after that it's good that the government had some change of heart, and they brought forward this piece of legislation.

On this side of the House we always have and we will continue to support geothermal resource development. We also have put forward a geothermal plan on albertasfuture.ca, which actually lists substantial and practical steps on how we can set ourselves up to be a leader in this area.

I remember that when the government announced their geothermal strategy, I don't think they said anything more than that they will plan to make a plan somewhere in the future, and when the media followed up, they said that they will do something about it, make a plan somewhere down the road. Even with this piece of legislation, the government is claiming that they will be providing businesses with certainty, some kind of regulatory framework, but the fact is that the government has not done their homework.

Diversification was not a priority for this government. They were never ready for this, and now we have this skeleton piece of legislation, which doesn't give any certainty, which leaves many of the questions unanswered, which doesn't address ownership issues, tenure issues, many other issues that are out there that industry is asking about, that businesses are asking about, that academia is questioning about. All they are saying in this one is that they will pass this piece of legislation, they will feel good about their diversification initiatives, they will go out and tell Albertans that they passed legislation, and then they will start doing their homework, then they will start looking for businesses they should consult with, and then they will bring back something that will be of any use for the industry.

As it stands now, I do not think that this piece of legislation has any certainty for the businesses. This piece of legislation doesn't have any plan for the diversification of our economy. After reading this piece of legislation, you're no better off knowing what the next steps will be. All it says is that government will go back and that government will consult. Quite frankly, we were in government, too, and to the best of my knowledge I think that government doesn't need a piece of legislation to go out and consult with

Albertans. It's not a prerequisite. Government can consult. That's the right way to do things. You do your homework, you collect information, you talk to the right stakeholders, and you bring forward a framework, a piece of legislation that gives some certainty, that answers some questions, that attracts some investments, that attracts new investment, that creates some jobs.

3:00

This piece of legislation is doing none of that. It's not creating any jobs, not attracting any investments. It's not giving any certainty of tenure for businesses who want to invest or look into geothermal. And all those questions that went unanswered before this will remain unanswered. That's what the government is literally saying in this legislation, that once they pass it, they will go out, they will consult, and they will develop the framework. As opposed to this, I think our geothermal strategy lays out the steps, what needs to be done. We even costed our strategy, presented some estimates as well that that's the amount of investment that can initially go in to set this regime up, to make Alberta a hub for geothermal energy and to capitalize on the opportunities that we have here with the abundance of natural resources, with opportunities in abandoned and orphan wells, and many other areas. This doesn't provide that certainty in this piece of legislation. It doesn't incentivize those businesses. It doesn't provide anything for them to, I guess, share the risk with them so that they can make initial investments, while our strategy, as opposed to this, does provide for that.

I think we have a history here in Alberta. Initially, when Premier Lougheed wanted to develop the oil and gas industry, many government resources, public money went into setting that industry up, that generated wealth for generations, that will continue to generate wealth for generations. But as opposed to that policy of Premier Lougheed, this government is not providing any kind of incentive for those who are willing to make initial efforts, those who are willing to do exploration work, and those who are willing to get their projects off the ground. There is no such thing in this piece of legislation.

We do know that many communities in Alberta do have concerns about orphan and abandoned wells. If we engage with those communities properly, I think those communities will be willing to step up if government is there to provide some incentive, if government is willing to work with them so that we can benefit and capitalize on those wells and turn them into geothermal resources.

I think there is another area which is missing, since we are trying to set up Alberta to be a leader in this area. I think for that, one of the basic and fundamental things that we need is to invest in research and innovation. We need to support our researchers. We need to support our institutions that help us innovate. Not only didn't the government set aside anything in this piece of legislation in terms of research and innovation but in the last 18 months their record is that they have been cutting from research and innovation.

They have cut funding from universities. They have cut funding from Alberta Innovates. Those places are the hubs of research, are the hubs of innovation, and if this government is really serious about developing geothermal, innovating the economy, diversifying the economy, then I think we need to put our money where our mouth is. We need to support our education system. We need to support our universities. We need to fund them properly so they can research, they can produce researchers, they can produce ideas, they can innovate things. If on one hand we are cutting universities, we are cutting their funding . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has risen. Correct? Oh, I actually made a slight mistake there. I was actually looking at Drayton Valley-Devon first. I apologize for that.

Mr. Smith: Well, I don't know. We can arm-wrestle for it if you really like.

The Deputy Chair: There's an arm wrestle that's going to happen. We've got lots of time in Committee of the Whole.

Please.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, and my apologies to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka here. I wanted to stand up and speak just a little bit in rebuttal to the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. I'm not sure how we could differ so greatly on this. I know that so many of my colleagues in the opposition have put renewable sources of energy at the front of their vision for Alberta and where they want to go, often to the detriment of our own oil and gas industry. I guess when I look at this bill, I have a very different response than what I have just heard.

You know, you suggested that we make a plan somewhere, that there needs to be a plan somewhere down the road. Well, that down the road is now, and this piece of legislation is addressing that. I can remember being elected in 2015 and becoming interested in this geothermal industry as a complement to the oil and gas work that we see across this province and realizing that so many of the skills and so many of the opportunities that our oil and gas industry has provided for the workers of this province could be addressed through this idea of geothermal energy and the diversification of our energy industry into the geothermal portion of industry.

That plan is now. It's here. We have seen the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans, and the entrepreneurial spirit of people interested in geothermal energy has come to the forefront and has begun to move to the point where our government saw the need and the importance of addressing a legal and regulatory framework that would allow these entrepreneurs in Alberta to be able to move forward and to diversify and to create. The plan is now, and the plan is partially seen in this piece of legislation.

You say that this is not creating a single job, that it's not going to provide any certainty. Well, I'm not sure that you could be any further from the truth. The reality is that whether we're talking about Razor or Terrapin or Eavor, a company that I'm far more familiar with than the previous two, these companies are creating jobs. As a matter of fact, I'm aware of the fact that if we allow the creative entrepreneurial skills of these companies to come to the forefront, we're going to be creating thousands of jobs across this province amongst the very individuals that have grown this province with their skills in the oil and gas industry; those drillers, those people that are working in the vac trucks, and all of the electricians and all of the people that are putting in the roads to the well sites and all of the engineers that are a part of looking for that heat. All of those skills that we have developed and that are world-class in the energy industry of oil and gas will be used in this geothermal industry.

3:10

So I'm not sure how the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall cannot see that we are going to be creating jobs. The jobs will be there, and they are there. As a matter of fact, the two rigs down near Rimbey, where they drilled the pilot project for Eavor not this summer but the summer before, where I had members from my constituency that were actually a part of that project . . .

Mr. Bilous: Under our government.

Mr. Smith: Yeah. Not that it received any help from the former government.

What we've got is a member here that can't seem to see that, yeah, there are going to be jobs, that, yeah, this legislation actually does provide certainty. When we have to define what heat is, that's an integral part of moving this geothermal industry forward, that we have a clear understanding that heat is a resource. We define it in this piece of legislation, and we begin looking at surface rights. We're not just talking about looking at some granting program for a university engineer or a university professor or some scientist to be looking; we're actually providing through this piece of legislation the capacity for entrepreneurs and for businesses in this province to have the certainty to actually create the jobs and create the wealth and create a new industry in this province. We're moving forward, creating energy that will be some of the most in-demand energy.

It's baseload. It's not like wind and solar energy, that are not baseload energy. This is baseload energy. It's there 24/7, 365 and a quarter days of the year. It's dependable. We are going to be having an industry that invests in creating new technology based on our world-leading skills and capacity that we've nurtured and grown and become world leaders in through the oil and gas industry. This sets the foundation for royalties and how we will share that wealth with the citizens of this province through a royalty regime. That provides certainty. Without this piece of legislation these industries, these companies, these entrepreneurs across Alberta would have had and have had a hard time finding the capital necessary to be able to progress.

This bill wisely, in a very complex field, sets out the legal and regulatory framework for a geothermal industry, and then it says: "And you know what? We're also going to" – and I know it's happening as we speak. I know that it's happening as we move our way through this piece of legislation, where the industry itself, the stakeholders within that industry are being asked: "What do you think of these regulations? How are they working out? What do we need to change?" We're responsive to the industry because we understand that by growing and diversifying the energy industry and economy that we have in Alberta into geothermal, we are helping Albertans to free up their entrepreneurial spirit, to pursue opportunity, to pursue wealth, and to pursue energy self-sufficiency. This is a good piece of legislation.

You know, when I look at this, I want to remind the members of the opposition that when we talk about diversification, we're not just thinking about something that's going to be in a university, that maybe 30 or 40 years down the road is going to come to fruition. What we've got are entrepreneurs. I taught for 30 years, and I used to have a teacher that would say that our students can get a great education within the four walls of the classroom, that I used to teach in, but there's a life of education outside of those four walls, and often it's better than what they would receive in my classroom. What we've got is that we've got companies in the energy industry across this province which are using their skills and their experience and applying them in real-world ways in order to be able to diversify the economy.

The time to diversify within our energy economy is now, and this bill is representative of that opportunity where we're freeing up the capacity of our entrepreneurs and our energy industry workers and our energy industry businesses to be able to move into a new industry. Yeah. But it must be placed into the context of others. E3 is drilling around the Rimbey area and creating, I believe, a \$400 million complex that's going to be drilling down into the Devonian formation, where they'll be bringing up the water of the Devonian lake, that covers, like, a third or half of Alberta, harvesting the lithium out of it, pumping the water back down, and then using that

lithium for the battery industry around the world, using our drilling, our knowledge of engineering, our geology, taking that knowledge base and applying it to another form of energy, lithium.

We're talking, in this government, about hydrogen and creating a new industry, an energy industry in hydrogen. If you'll notice something, all of these, whether it's geothermal or lithium or hydrogen, are taking the skills and the capacity and the ability of the people of Alberta – the engineers, the oil workers, the drillers – using our strengths to expand into new areas of energy.

This bill is about Alberta's future. You know what? I heard the opposition there saying: yeah, under our government we did it. Yeah, you had the opportunity. It didn't happen. It's this government – it's this government – that is moving Alberta into a new energy future on the backs and the strength of the energy industry that we have and that will continue to be important in this Alberta. Unlike the former government, where they did almost everything they could to push down the oil and gas industry, we understand the strengths of the oil and gas industry. We support the oil and gas industry, but we are also understanding that we can move into other areas of energy, and we can support those other areas of energy through legislation like this bill. We should be very proud. Every member in this Legislature should be proud of this piece of legislation as it opens up, as it creates opportunity, as it points towards a new vision for Alberta based solidly on the skills and the capacity that we have grown in our province through the oil industry.

Geothermal is not going to be a silver bullet for all of the jobs necessary in this province. For now it will be a niche. But just as the oil sands have become more efficient over the years, just as the oil sands have used new technology to be able to develop that resource for the benefit of Albertans – at one time they used draglines and conveyer belts. Now we're into SAGD. Just as we've seen that industry grow and mature and benefit Albertans, you're going to see the geothermal energy. Whether it's a more traditional form of geothermal where we're looking for a heat sink of high proportions or whether we're looking at the closed-loop system that Eavor has, these geothermal opportunities over the next few years, as we provide them with the foundation of legislation and regulation through this bill, will grow, will become more efficient, will become more competitive, will create more stability within our energy industry and within our electricity industry.

We have so much opportunity in this province. This government recognizes it. This government works with business. This government works with opportunity. This government is proud of the capacity that we have as Albertans to be able to take advantage of those opportunities to move forward. This piece of legislation is just one example of how this government is going to move forward towards a solid energy future in Alberta that will employ Albertans, that will grow Albertans, that will make us world leaders. Yes, this legislation is setting the foundation to make Albertans and the stakeholders and the industries that are going to be involved in this geothermal industry into world leaders. This is an industry that we can export around the world.

3:20

As a matter of fact, if we can do it here, we can do it anywhere. One of the things that I've learned through Eavor is that we can now chase energy from as low as about 100 to 120 degrees Celsius. That means that we can put that just about anywhere in a sedimentary basin not only in Alberta but around the world. We have some of the lowest electricity prices in the world right now because of our competitive market. If we can make this work here in Alberta, we can make it work in Europe, we can make it work in Asia, we can make it work in Japan, we can make it work in India because they

pay significantly more for their energy, for their electricity. If we can make this work on 6 or 7 or 8 cents a kilowatt hour here in Alberta, you can imagine how much better it's going to be able to work in places where they're paying triple, quadruple that. We know that we can export our expertise in oil and drilling and in lateral drilling. We can export our knowledge of geothermal and geology around the world so that we can export jobs and capital and opportunity not only in Alberta but around the world.

So when I take a look at this piece of legislation, I come to a very, very different conclusion than the opposition, who doesn't seem to be able to see the opportunity. Now, that doesn't surprise me because they haven't seen the opportunity in so many other areas of Alberta life. We are going to work with our oil and gas partners to make sure that we have the best oil and gas industry anywhere in the world, as we already do. We're going to work with those that are involved in lithium and the production of lithium because that provides opportunity for Albertans. We're going to work with those companies in this province and those workers in this province that understand that geothermal is an opportunity, an opportunity to provide work and success and wealth for the province of Alberta and for the citizens that live here.

Mr. Chair, we have an amazing opportunity here before us with this piece of legislation, so it gives me a great deal of pleasure to stand up and to speak positively to this bill. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 36 notwithstanding the rather impassioned though rather illogical comments of the speaker before me. We do in fact stand in support of the bill in general. It does create a regulatory framework, a regulatory framework that was a necessary precondition.

Unfortunately, the prior speaker seems to confuse a necessary precondition with a sufficient precondition, which are, of course, not the same things. A necessary precondition is something that must be done in order for the industry to evolve, and we agree that there needs to be a regulatory framework. There needs to be clear guidance about who owns the rights. That does not, however, make that a sufficient condition to grow the industry. So the challenge is that while this is a step forward, it will not on its own create any jobs despite, again, the rather impassioned and somewhat peculiar comments of the speaker immediately prior.

The concern with this act: well, there are several concerns with the act and several questions that we still have. It's a regulatory framework. No one disagrees that that is a step in the correct direction. I think the challenge is that most people who work in this space disagree that jobs will be created with this step alone, and that is because we need to see specific targeted investments in order to grow the industry. It is also because the way that this bill, as opposed to, say, the legislation in British Columbia, structures access to the rights makes it very, very difficult for a geothermal company to get access to those rights.

Now, that being said, I think that in addition to being in favour of it, we are in a position to suggest several improvements, because I think that when you have something, again, that is necessary though not sufficient, it makes sense to try and improve it for the betterment of all Albertans. With that, I would like to move an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: It's a little on the long side. Instead of just reading it fully into the record, how about you give us the Coles Notes version.

We'll make sure that we have copies for anybody who wants to read it at the tables to the side, and if you put up your hand, then we'll deliver one to you as well.

Good to go.

Ms Ganley: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: For the record this will be amendment A1.

Ms Ganley: Amendment A1, which I will not read because of the aforementioned length. Essentially, what this does is that it creates a review period that goes to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship. What it sends to be reviewed are rules made under section 26. Like I said, this act is a broad regulatory framework. Obviously, it can't operate on its own, so in order to support the act, to support the industry, it requires rules made by the Alberta Energy Regulator under section 26, and it allows regulations that can be made by cabinet under section 27. Essentially, because so much of this framework is being left to the regulations, what this does is that it sends to the committee the rules and the regulations in order that the committee might review those things and talk to stakeholders and see how they're working.

I think that when you're talking about setting up a new industry of any type, things are necessarily going to be a bit imperfect. You kind of set up the framework. You do your best to talk to stakeholders. One of the concerns I have with this bill is that most of the stakeholders feel like they were not sufficiently engaged although they were – most of them have said to me: we were well engaged under the NDP government. Unfortunately, it appears that in drafting this, the UCP government has taken that information that would have been in the civil service and used it to draft the act. However, they feel that the UCP could have come back to them for further engagement, which I think is a fair thing for them to feel.

What this does is that it gives the opportunity for a public review so that we can hear from stakeholders to see how things are working, which, you know, if you're actually interested in moving forward with a good program, if you're actually interested in attracting investment, if you're actually interested in creating jobs, is something that the government should absolutely be in favour of. Because this is a developing industry, it's just prudent to bring in a review. We'll have the opportunity to see how the framework works. We'll have an opportunity to see the rules that are put in place by the AER, the regulations as implemented by the minister and cabinet, and this would help to identify any potential shortcomings as we move forward. So I think this is a fairly common-sense amendment. I think that, you know, if we all have an interest in the same thing – and I think at least we all have a stated interest in the same thing, which is to say, moving forward to create jobs for Albertans – then we ought to all be interested in this.

Now, at this point I'd like to highlight one of the differences between what we've been proposing and what the UCP has been proposing, which is to say that we are proposing sort of targeted investments. Now, I understand that the UCP has made some announcements. They have not, to the best of my understanding, been exceptionally well received thus far. Part of the concern is that we have a government who referred to diversification as a luxury, who has a history of losing jobs even before the pandemic in this province, so that's problematic. The stakeholders in this industry and the opposition are happy to help out in this respect to help the government to sort of get back on the right track, start creating some jobs. I think that this would give us and give the stakeholders the opportunity to do exactly that.

3:30

Now, admittedly, I haven't had recent conversations, but my early conversations with the minister suggested that there would in fact be amendments coming from the government on this bill, as well, as they had the chance to consult with stakeholders. Assuming that they've heard roughly what we heard, perhaps we'll see some of those forthcoming although maybe this was one of them, and maybe we've helped them out and saved them the time and trouble of doing that.

I think it's an exciting move forward. I hope that we're all in a position to work together on this. I think that if there is one thing on which this government truly needs help from outside, it is the creation of jobs, because they really seem to struggle. I mean, if they're willing to accept the help, at least perhaps we can move forward. I think Albertans have been clear that that is what they want and that that is what they need. So I'm hopeful that we'll see the government accept this.

A couple of other things, you know, I think are worth talking about, because the industry has already started to identify some challenges, which, again, is the purpose of this review, to identify challenges with the legislation as it stands. One of those is that the way the government has vested the rights versus the way B.C. has done it makes it very challenging for geothermal operators to get a hold of them. Even though 81 per cent of the rights in this province are owned by the Crown, a large, large portion of mineral rights in this province are owned already. That leaves the geothermal producers in a position where they're having to sort of try to deal with other companies that are doing other things, who maybe have no particular interest in whether or not geothermal technology is moving forward.

So those companies aren't necessarily going to be in a position to let those geothermal producers in to get access, right? That sort of creates another hurdle, another barrier, and one thing you don't want to do when you're starting up sort of a new industry, especially when you're hoping to create jobs right now, is to put up additional hurdles, where people have to sort of have additional contracts and have additional parties that they're dealing with. That has been identified to me as a concern by geothermal operators who would otherwise be in a position to start moving on this as soon as the act comes in.

Again, I think everyone – the opposition, the stakeholders – is supportive of moving forward with a framework. No one is suggesting that this act is a bad thing. We're just suggesting that even though it's a necessary step, it's not a sufficient step, so it needs a little bit more in order to do what the stated objective is.

The hope is that the government can potentially make some changes, make some amendments, deal with some rules, and there are multiple ways. There are multiple ways to overcome that hurdle that has been created by this act; that is to say, the difficulty for geothermal producers to access the rights. I think the challenge is – you know, we will propose some of those ways, and perhaps the government has different ways they want to do it, but in any event this will give us the opportunity to sort of evaluate how that has worked and consider whether we want to do more moving forward.

The reason I think this is so important is because the reason this act is here, the reason we moved on this and did the consultation and did the work that underlies this act and the reason that we came forward with a geothermal strategy, is because I think everyone agrees that this is something we need to move forward on and that we need to move forward on expeditiously for two reasons. One, because it does capitalize on the skills and the expertise and the abilities that we have right here in Alberta already, and then we can export it around the world. That is an absolutely good thing.

Another reason that it's important is because it potentially deals with some liabilities that we have in terms of orphan wells around this province, because in some instances those wells could be utilized for geothermal. So that's one of the possibilities moving forward. That's another good reason.

A third reason, obviously, is that we do in fact need to take steps to address climate change. This is something that's necessary. We all know it's real. Well, I hope we all know it's real. Some days in this place one wonders. We need to move forward to address that, and we need to do it urgently. We don't have an enormous amount of time to do this. Most of the leading scientists are suggesting that, you know, if we don't start making changes now, in 10 years it's going to be too late. That's why it's so important that we move forward expeditiously. That's why I think it's so important to examine this so quickly, to make sure that those rules are supporting the growth of the industry, because this really does have a lot of potential. Now, we're not a hundred per cent sure how much potential because we don't really have the data on where the heat is, where it's accessible. We do know it's mostly low-enthalpy heat here in Alberta, which I have heard argued both ways, whether it's best used for heating or whether it's best used for electricity or whether it could be used for electricity. But in any event both of those are things which currently contribute to climate change and which we could reverse.

Developing geothermal right now: really important for that reason, also really important because we have people who are out of work now. Those people don't want jobs two years from now. They want jobs right now because they need to pay their mortgages and feed their families, and they're struggling. They're struggling for a lot of reasons. They're struggling because of a pandemic, because of a drop in the price of oil, because this government seems to really like making their lives more expensive. So those individuals want to move forward right now, and we would like them to be able to move forward right now. I will take the government at their word and believe that they are sincere in also wanting to move forward right now. It seems to me that with everyone being in agreement, this should be something that we just do and we move on.

So this review will enable us to do that work, to do it publicly, to go through and ensure that when the rules and the regulations come out, they are in fact supporting the growth of that industry, which I think, again, we're in agreement on. I mean, we aren't in agreement that often in this place, so perhaps we should celebrate that by passing this amendment, which is why I would encourage members to vote in favour.

As we're all aware, the rules that will be set out ultimately by the AER will have a huge impact on the ability of this industry to grow, so it's important to review those. The regulations that are set out will have a huge impact. Part of the challenge is that this framework in and of itself doesn't set out a royalty. It has been suggested that there will be a royalty holiday for 10 years, and then a royalty will come in, that if you're extracting heat with another mineral, you may never pay a royalty. But I think that, you know, as quickly as possible developing a sense of certainty around what that's going to be is important. When people make investments, they want to know what the long-term prospects of those investments are, so having that information is incredibly important.

I think I will reiterate that one of the most important things that can happen right away is that the government can sort of move to solve in one of multiple ways the problem of geothermal companies being challenged in their ability to access the heat. That challenge occurs because, again, like I've said, even though the Crown owns most of the minerals in the province, a huge proportion of them are

leased. Again, that leads to these companies having to deal with multiple parties.

Now, there's another challenge, that I will address in another amendment, that has to do with the fact of the provision to access the land. The minister has referred to it as: this one is only the emergency provision. But there's no sort of recourse to the Surface Rights Board, so that's potentially challenging. It's not really clear whether that's supposed to go to court. As we know, the challenge with sending things to court is not that the court doesn't do a good job but just that they take a very long time to get there because over the course of decades the courts have sort of slowed down significantly.

3:40

This leaves people who want to invest now, companies who want to invest now, companies who want to create jobs now in a bit of an unfortunate position because it means that they are unable to get access immediately, and they're having to sort of deal with other parties, and since we don't have an enormous amount of information because we haven't done the research, they're having to get access even to do the sort of work to understand what it is they're after. That's a challenge. They don't know if they're going to be able to get access to the heat, ultimately, because they're having to deal with multiple other parties who have leases to other minerals. So that is potentially quite problematic for these geothermal producers, and it's potentially extremely problematic to the ability of the industry to develop immediately.

It is absolutely my hope that the government will accept this amendment and others, which I have not so subtly alluded to at this point, as we move forward because I think it's important to the people of Alberta. It's important to the future of this province, it's important right now in terms of jobs, it's important in the future in terms of addressing climate change, so it's really a win-win situation.

I also hope we'll hear sort of more coming out of the government in terms of incentives to industry. I know the program that people had sort of been consulted on thus far has some challenges, which I can address at another time. You know, we really do want to see this industry build, and I hope that we'll start to see the government working more with all participants in this area, with all players in this area to take into account their knowledge and expertise. People have been waiting for this. We know that because we've been talking to them.

I'm incredibly hopeful that we can move forward with this amendment, and I would encourage all members of the House to vote in favour of it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure if I have to have a jacket on to speak during Committee of the Whole, but I think it's appropriate anyways.

I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View bringing forth this thoughtful amendment. It's quite a large one. I look through it, and I see a couple of things that stand out to me in particular that I think are, at a 30,000-foot view, quite problematic and things that run contrary to the general mandate of this government, which is to attract new investment to our province by reducing red tape and making Alberta a very competitive jurisdiction in which to do business.

If we look at committee review, section 27.1(2)(b) and (c), at the bottom here, we're looking at, effectively, extending the review process. Now, while I understand that we do have to be thoughtful

and that we have to be thorough in a review process to ensure that we're checking all the boxes when it comes to energy projects, this is an instance where, you know, if we start looking at review processes, we could do them as long as we want. You could turn this to 30 days, 60 days, to 100 days, whatever. The reality is that through the process of approval I believe that they will be looking at this project thoroughly to ensure that it meets the criteria for approval.

I don't think that we need to extend this review period. I think what we're actually doing here is increasing steps before we can get Albertans to work, before we can get people coming to Alberta who want to work on the job site. That's a problem for me because, as we know, we are facing what is a terrible pandemic and a slump in oil prices, and we're looking for any competitive advantage we might have in this province. I think we have a number of competitive advantages, not the least of which is our very capable and able workforce.

But the reality is that I look at this amendment, and I see that it is ultimately trying to extend the review process, add red tape that will ultimately lead to the same resolution, which is getting Albertans to work. I don't see a need to extend the process. I don't see a need for this amendment. Though I do believe it's thoughtful, some of the comments from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View weren't necessary, directed at the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. All that to say that I will not be supporting this amendment, and I encourage my colleagues to not support it as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak a little bit around the amendment here that we have to Bill 36, the Geothermal Resource Development Act here. You know, I'm unfortunately a little dismayed with the Member for Cardston-Siksika not being willing to support the amendment. I know his colleagues on the government bench, his colleagues in the government caucus, when they served in the 29th Legislature, were continually, consistently, and constantly asking for legislation to go for review in front of committees. They were adamant about this, and here we have a piece of legislation that I think – and I, of course, would never ever presuppose the decision of the Assembly, but I think there's agreement for this to move forward because it's an opportunity.

I know there were some comments earlier around how, you know, we never seem to look at opportunities. I have to refer back to the digital media tax credit because that was something that industry asked for in order to be able to grow here in Alberta, create jobs, create good-paying jobs. We enabled that. I mean, to some degree we actually didn't even match what was going on in other jurisdictions, and the industry was excited to come here. I think my colleague from Calgary-McCall had mentioned earlier about funding our postsecondary institutions so that we continue to offer the type of education that Albertans can access to be able to be a part of these exciting industries because they will have the training with which to take these companies and lead on the world stage. Despite the fact that the digital media tax credit did not reach the same levels as other jurisdictions, those companies were very, very excited to come to this province, to invest in this province, and they already had one of the most important resources readily available right here, and that's Albertans.

I do believe that geothermal development could potentially be another one of those industries that we as the province of Alberta can take advantage of and lead ahead of everyone else. I mean,

wouldn't it be exciting if that industry, just like what the gaming industry potentially has to offer in terms of a \$200 billion industry in the next two years, two years away – now, it's unfortunate that the current government cancelled that digital media tax credit, and we've just now lost 18 months of building that industry. But there was thorough consultation around that. It's the whole reason why it got brought in to begin with.

Now what I'm hearing: "Oh, well, we're just going to be going through an unnecessary step" in terms of sending this to committee, which is what this amendment is suggesting. I have to ask. Did those members – and I'm sure those members of the 29th Legislature have shared these stories with their colleagues that serve in the 30th. Is it, then, in fact, that you believe important legislation should go before a committee, or do you actually not believe it? I think that by voting down this amendment that we have to Bill 36, which I believe will be able to quickly go through the steps to confer with the geothermal industry – I know my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View had gone into great depth around this and what she's been hearing. To me, it sounds like the industry is not only ready to walk, Mr. Chair; I think it's ready to run. So why don't we get together? Why don't we find out what kinds of regulations need to be in place so that they can run? This is our opportunity to take a decent piece of legislation here.

3:50

Now, you know, I've said before, earlier when I've spoken to this, that I would like to actually see the investment backed up with this. I know my colleague said that companies within the industry are trying to look for investors. They're trying to create that excitement, as they should. Well, why don't we step up as a province and say, "Yeah, this is an industry that we can back"? I mean, you know, I have to say that we were ready to back a pipeline with \$7.5 billion. Hopefully, an election didn't mess those plans up. But here we have an industry that we can invest in. We don't have to worry about an election. We don't have to worry about what's going on across another border. This is within our own jurisdiction. We have an opportunity here to back up the legislation that we're putting forward.

I've said this before: sometimes it's just not enough to enable legislation. Especially with a new, potentially robust industry that could grow here, we should be prepared to move that along, and it sounds like the industry is ready to run here. Let's group up with them, you know, go to the committee level, get them at the committee so that we can create the best legislation for them to go with as well as potentially invest in that industry because that should send a signal to other investors: well, if their own province is ready to back them up, there shouldn't be any reason why we shouldn't back them up as well. We will be able to create, most likely, some very good-paying jobs out of this.

I would like to see that same kind of investment in the digital media area because, as I've pointed out before, there are some very, very good salaries being paid to people, just not here. As I had mentioned earlier, when it kind of says, "Well, you know, we're not interested in business, and we've chased away investment," I would suggest that the actions of the government have actually done the same thing with regard to this industry. Just one example, but it's a very, very blatant example.

Two hundred billion dollars: why do we not want to get a piece of that action? Let's show the world that Alberta is ready to step behind geothermal. It will also help us for our commitment with regard to climate change, and it will put us on the map as a place to go not only to invest but to find out what it is that we've done so that others can duplicate the process.

You know, one of the things I always love to be able to talk about: back in the 29th, when the NDP was government, I had the distinct honour on behalf of the then minister of economic development and trade to be able to go down to the United States and represent Alberta at the Council of State Governments. Some of the conversations that I had with U.S. legislators were: "What is this climate leadership plan that you guys have going on in Alberta? This is incredibly interesting." I even had some legislators saying: how is it that we can duplicate what you're doing? This was the type of impact that Alberta was having here in North America.

Why don't we send this to committee, take only a short period of time, create the regulations so that the industry can then run, not just walk? We've already identified some challenges here, and they're not bad challenges. I want to be clear about that. It's not that these are bad challenges. They're just challenges that we think are going to slow things down. What's that saying, Mr. Chair? Sometimes you need to slow down in order to speed up. By taking a short block of time, we will allow that industry to be able to run, to be able to create a robust industry that I'm almost certain will be the envy of the world. The investors will come here and the people that want to duplicate what we're doing here in Alberta over in their own jurisdictions, which creates a whole other opportunity, which, of course, doesn't necessarily specifically revolve around Bill 36 right now.

So I certainly want to urge folks across the way to really take a hard look at this. We have an opportunity to take advantage of an industry that will be ahead of everybody else. I know my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has probably a lot to say on this, especially on some of the specifics. We have an opportunity here that we just cannot pass up simply because we don't think it should go to a committee for a short period of time.

I have to admit that I'm starting to see some patterns around this, especially in the committee that I serve on. Why don't we want to take the opportunity to connect with stakeholders? They're the ones that will know best. They're the ones that will be able to give us exactly what they need, especially if I'm seeing some challenges.

Mr. Chair, my hope is that maybe we'll see some changing minds here. I mean, the bill itself is essentially a change of mind in terms of the government. One minute we went from "These types of things are a luxury" to "Well, we need to diversify our economy." I am grateful that they've kind of seen the light around this. Hopefully, they'll see some changes going forward with some other opportunities, maybe perhaps like what I just mentioned and the digital media tax credit.

I look forward to seeing the debate going forward and will most likely have comments as it progresses. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it. I do have to speak against the amendment. I just think it will create clumsiness in a situation that needs to be fluid and able to adapt on a regular basis. The last few years in Alberta the energy sector has been struggling, and the world literally is on a quest for green energy solutions, which is a good thing, but our oil and gas companies have been struggling to find markets for their products. Many in the province have been searching for ways to repurpose their existing skill set. Recently the University of Alberta conducted a study that provided some innovative opportunities by identifying I think it was seven areas in our province that are primed for the untapped resource of natural, renewable, thermal energy.

It's my pleasure, actually, to rise and really voice support for the government moving forward on this bill as it is, the Geothermal

Resource Development Act. I really believe that it has the opportunity to usher in a new era for Alberta, a new era of opportunities. Geothermal wells are an important initiative to diversify Alberta's energy production while maintaining our government's commitment to existing energy producers. Geothermal energy is a form of production not fully utilized in our province yet. We need regulation. It's a renewable energy that can provide not only electricity but heating and cooling in a very effective way.

4:00

Often located at significant depths, it's a resource that takes considerable effort to extract and, quite frankly, innovative new processes to do it well, to tap it. It can happen, and I would like to focus on a particular company in my riding that intends to repurpose existing wells. In some cases other companies are seeking to drill new wells, purpose-drilled wells, but existing wells can also be used to tap the geothermal heat energy of the Earth. Drilling and downhole technology is an area in which Albertans have tremendous expertise. Existing oil and gas companies already are piloting projects to be industry leaders.

I'd like to just share a little bit of one of those, a company by the name of, I think, H-Bayn, with a small "h," which actually is the scientific symbol for enthalpy, which describes their process. It's the H-Bayn Thermo-Electric company. It's really a collaboration of experienced energy professionals, both in my riding, Calgary, and other areas, a group of engineers who have been working together and consultants, some drawn from the U.S. and some from Canada, and they've created a company. They've already verified the theoretical and scientific processes that would need to happen. They've filed patents for their processes. They've met with Energy Alberta.

Their financing is already in place, and one of the great things about this company is that it's a low-capital venture. They're not asking for any government money. They don't need government money. In fact, they're hoping to have all of their financing in place by the end of this month and begin a pilot project in January of the coming year near Edson. What they really need is regulatory clarity, and they need resolution to the issue of liability for repurposed wells. I think this is the area that this bill seeks to move forward on. There are likely, as in every endeavour in this world, to be modifications and changes moving forward, but these are the issues that they need.

Their process is to use existing wells at sort of the end of life in thermal zones, of course. They will use Alberta downhole technology to seal and cement that well off, to isolate with the geology around them. They will flush it completely clean. Then they will use an enthalpy process, a rank-and-cycle process adapted specifically for well use. It's something that's used often in coal and nuclear power plants but at much higher temperatures. Their technological approach allows them to do this at much lower temperatures relative to the thermal heat that can be found in wells in the proper zones in Alberta.

They send a specific unique liquid down. It's not water because water takes much too high a temperature to function in wells. It heats, and as it heats, it turns to a gas and expands. It comes up under pressure to turn a turbine, through a thermal expander turbine, and through that they can generate electricity to the grid. Then that liquid cools, condenses back into a liquid, and goes back down the hole to be reheated, re-expanded, come up under pressure again, and continue to turn the turbine.

They can use existing wells. There's no need for government money. It's a very low-capital cost for them to get started relative to having to drill a new well, and they've had really no difficulty

attracting investment to this, as I understand. They have the investors already. What they need is the regulatory clarity in place, the resolution to the liability of the previously existing well use when it gets transferred and dedicated to a new and different use. This will definitely create long-term jobs for communities, not to mention the added benefit of providing an inexpensive source of electricity and heating for, in many cases, remote areas. They are working with aboriginal groups. They're working with some greenhouse groups to use some of that as well.

Currently, though, our province has no legislation on this emerging technology, and each site is determined on an experimental case-by-case basis, creating significant hurdles. It is not an acceptable solution in the long term. This legislation will create clarity by placing the deep geothermal projects in the Alberta Energy Regulator's hands. That body, then the regulatory body, can ensure that the environment is adequately protected, all the issues of management and control will be directed, and it will provide some flexibility and the ability to make decisions as needed and to exercise some discretion on an emerging technology as it changes and evolves.

Geothermal technology can provide the economic growth that many Albertans are sorely seeking. It allows our constituents to showcase their ingenuity by providing new fields of research for engineering. With a strong track record of innovation, we have the potential to lead the next generation and the world in resource and technology development. We can provide concrete examples to the world that Alberta is still a leader in energy production and innovation while simultaneously growing our reputation of having extremely high environmental standards, precisely what many international and local investors seek for their portfolios. Geothermal energy can also provide economic opportunity for our indigenous communities that, as I've already said, may not have been previously accessible to them, furthering our commitment to partner with them to ensure their success.

Alberta's recent past has been financially complicated for many, and this act makes strides to remove barriers from the path of those seeking a better life in the present while ensuring the sustainability of our future. Bill 36 sends a clear message to the world that our province is open for business. Establishing a geothermal regulatory regime through this bill will install the certainty investors seek, create good-paying jobs for those in areas who are struggling. It will help get Alberta's economy back on track, delivering on the mandate that our government received, and further develop the notion that a full life includes work that doesn't just provide a living but dignity. That's one of the goals, actually, of the company that I've been referring to, their ESG standards and a reasonable lifestyle for employees and all of the rest that goes with that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to restate my support of the Geothermal Resource Development Act, and I do have to stand against the amendment as presented. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's been a great debate so far, but I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 36.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 38

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time on the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm just grabbing my notes here. I can see the deputy government whip is just having fun as I was gearing up to talk about geothermal. I know that there will be other opportunities, but I was just organizing my thoughts. Now we're switching tracks, and that's quite all right.

With the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, I know our Justice critic has outlined a number of questions, and I know that this bill has recently come into committee, so my hope is that we'll have some ample opportunity, Mr. Chair, to have a robust exchange back and forth. I will say at the outset that Committee of the Whole is my favourite stage to debate bills, and that's really because it provides an opportunity for that back and forth. I will, you know, applaud and commend ministers who engage. There are a number of ministers from the UCP government that do engage on a regular basis. The first one that jumps to mind is the minister of labour, who is very active and hands-on with his bills. My hope is that we will continue that – I don't know that I want to call it a precedent – with other ministers moving forward.

4:10

This act, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, amends six different acts, Mr. Chair, a number of them that apply to indigenous police services. Now, we know that First Nations desire to self-govern and that, you know, the nation-to-nation relationship is very, very important. I'm curious to know if the government, in drafting this piece of legislation, did in fact consult with all of the First Nations or at least their representatives. I appreciate we have many, many different First Nations within our province. One of the things that I'd like to ask the minister to table is a bit of an economic impact study, if they did conduct one and if they would share it with members of the House. What I'm talking about is – let's take an in-depth look at the costs of indigenous policing, how that cost breakdown will be shared.

We know that the reserve lands are a responsibility of or that it's the federal government who works directly with our First Nations reserves. I will say, though, that I'm a big fan of all orders of government working and not shirking responsibility, to say: well, that's federal jurisdiction. A great example was our colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who was the former Minister of Indigenous Relations, in our time in government, who ensured that – well, let me just back up for a quick second. There are a number of indigenous communities around the province of Alberta that still do not have access to clean drinking water, and if that fact surprises you, I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that surprised me as well. Even though, again, it falls to the federal government to be funding the infrastructure to ensure that our indigenous communities have access to clean drinking water, in our time in government we didn't wait for the federal government. We stepped up and committed funding to ensure that they have access to clean drinking water because we believe it's a human right.

Having said that, I'm just curious to know how the provincial government plans to work with the federal government around creating indigenous policing. I'm curious to know what dispute resolution mechanisms are going to be put into place. I'm also curious to know if the government envisions how it's going to work geographically, because we know, Mr. Chair, that we have an incredible population of urban indigenous peoples that are within and throughout our cities and throughout the province. Will the indigenous police have access or jurisdiction within the cities as well? Will they work in tandem with our city police? I'm curious to know what the relationship will be as well between the RCMP and the indigenous police force. You know, a number of questions. I'm sure my colleagues have others related to that act, Mr. Chair.

The Jury Act, as well, is one of the other acts that's being amended in this piece of legislation in that it's talking about allowing jury summons to be sent electronically, which I think seems very, very reasonable. In fact, I think, you know, the process of digitizing government is a smart move, is something that we should be doing whenever we possibly can. This also makes a lot of sense during this current COVID pandemic.

I'm curious that when it talks about in this legislation how the – the bill refers to using information obtained under the authority of this act with a person's consent. I'm curious how consent is going to be obtained with this, you know, electronic communication and electronic summons.

The other thing, too, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, is that I don't think it's spelled out exactly how the electronic communications will work. Of course, as has probably happened to every single member in this place, you are expecting an e-mail, the e-mail goes into your junk folder, and you didn't know it was there until the person attempts to get a hold of you a few more times. Obviously, in the case of jury summons, which is extremely important, what mechanisms, what assurances can the minister put in place so that we know that these electronic communications are going to be received, whether that's a reply or some kind of confirmation? Just curious. I mean, that may be in the details of the regulations, but I want to just raise that as a question.

Another act that gets amended, Mr. Chair, is the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. Now, this obviously amends the Police Act regarding indigenous police services, which is fantastic. Something else that I do appreciate as well is that it doesn't require police to appear in person for affidavit of evidence. Now, that may have implications for procedural fairness. However, my understanding is that what that may do as well is just free up more time by providing opportunities for police, well, to not have to appear in person. I don't know if there are provisions within this for them to appear, if they need to, digitally. Again, it's allowing teleconferencing aspects for the trial. I think that will have with it both cost savings in terms of financial but also time savings, again, if we can use teleconferencing.

Again, the timing of the government bringing forward some of these amendments is very good in the fact that I think that we have all adapted significantly through this pandemic to the use of, you know, virtual and telecommunications, online communications, et cetera. If this can help save time and expedite, at least in this act that's being amended, time, then I think that is very good. I would imagine that some of these amendments have come because of COVID and how courts have had to adapt. I'm just curious to know what kind of supports, in addition to amending this legislation, the government has put in place or is looking to to support our courts.

Okay. Moving along, Mr. Chair, there are amendments to the Queen's Counsel Act. Now, this adds entitlement of the QC for 10 years of practice in superior courts in the Commonwealth common-law jurisdictions. I'm just curious why the government is amending the QC status at this time. Again, this is a different act, so if the minister says, "Well, we're already making amendments," well, you're amending six different acts, so why not five? Why this one? This amendment doesn't provide either an objective or competency-based criteria for appointing QCs. I know that, you know, throughout Alberta's history there have been a number of QC appointments that were questionable as far as: were they based on merit, or were they based on rewards for friends and others? I know that this was something that under our government – I don't have the number of QC appointments, but I know that we took it extremely seriously and looked at credibility criteria, that it was merit based for those that did get that appointment.

4:20

Another act that is amended, Mr. Chair, is the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. Now, that's typically about 2 and a half million dollars per year. That's expected to be about a million dollars this year. Questions that, I believe, my colleagues and I will ask are around what the forfeiture applies to, because it's been expanded significantly.

In this amendment it removes the power from the Lieutenant Governor in Council to decide which laws or regs civil forfeiture applies to. I'm just curious: who's going to make those decisions? If that's getting removed as an authority of cabinet, does that fall to the individual minister? Who does that fall to? It also removes the restitution assistance program, so it removes claim of restitution when victims are unknown. It makes several other changes, quite honestly. I'm curious for the minister to maybe speak a little bit about some of these changes that are being made in this section of the bill but also more broadly, Mr. Chair, in other sections. Who asked for this, and what really is the rationale behind some of these changes?

Something that my colleagues have spoken to at length are changes to the Referendum Act, which will allow referendums to be held through mechanisms of municipal elections at the time of municipal elections. My understanding, Mr. Chair, is that municipalities were not consulted on this, on whether they wanted it. I know there is concern with a referendum happening simultaneously as a municipal election at the same time as the trustees are elected. You know, there were changes that this government made not too long ago, and now they're making changes again. I don't know if this government consulted with the Election Commissioner or Elections Alberta.

A question I have around costs. On the one hand I hear regularly that the government is trying to cut costs and save money. I mean, this is, you know, at the same time that there are certain massive expenditures that this government is embarking on. You can't say that the cupboards are bare after you've emptied them out already. You know, Mr. Chair, we know that last year, in 2019, the UCP government doubled their deficit to \$12.5 billion, twice as big as what they forecast and what they planned for and what they budgeted for. I think members would be interested to know that that's larger than any deficit that the NDP ran in our four years in government, and Albertans are asking: what did they get for it? Again, we saw in 2019 50,000 jobs lost. We saw a plan that focused on one thing and one thing only, which was a race to the bottom, with our corporate taxes being the so-called silver bullet of this government, and it failed to create jobs. We heard from a number of companies and sectors that said: a corporate tax reduction does nothing to help us.

I would add to that, Mr. Chair, that especially during these challenging COVID times, you know, most small businesses are struggling to stay afloat; they're not paying the corporate tax rate. They're probably barely turning a profit at all to stay afloat, so they'd actually be paying the small-business tax rate. Of course, Alberta's is the second lowest in the country thanks to the Alberta NDP government, who reduced the small-business tax rate by a third. We have the second-lowest small-business tax rate in the country.

I find it fascinating, actually, that the province that has the lowest small-business tax rate is Manitoba, Mr. Chair, and that's because of a New Democrat Premier, Gary Doer, who reduced the small-business tax rate in Manitoba to zero. So despite what some may think, it's a myth and a falsehood that Conservatives are either better at managing money or better on taxes.

Again, I mean, it was under this current government, just last budget, that they increased personal income tax on every single

Albertan. Yeah. That took a lot of people by surprise. Then, of course, we're just seeing a layering of costs. User fees, park fees: costs have gone up all over the place. What's frustrating for me is that you can't say that we're keeping taxes low but then nickel and dime Albertans at every turn. You know, we didn't do that. We tried to make sure that accessing our province and the natural wonders of our province was affordable and accessible for all Albertans.

You know, when we look at some of these changes, I'm just curious to know what price they're going to come with. I know that when we were in government and the UCP members were in opposition, they would often ask about economic impact assessments, a fair question. I'm curious to know if this government has conducted one as it relates to the changes that they're making through this bill, and if they have, then I'm calling on the minister to table it with the Assembly so that all members of this Chamber can see, well, what the economic impact is of these changes, right?

As I pointed out earlier, you know, allowing some police to not have to attend in person – I'm just trying to find it in my notes, Mr. Chair. I would imagine that there is a cost saving, but again I'm guessing and I would hope that – yeah. Police don't have to appear in person for an affidavit of evidence. I'm just curious if that section has a cost saving that comes with it and other sections, quite frankly.

You know, by introducing or providing an opportunity for indigenous policing, that will obviously free up other police. Again, is the federal government going to contribute to this? When it comes to policing on-reserve, that is predominantly the RCMP. If they no longer have the jurisdiction or the responsibility to do that, how does that fall to our indigenous police?

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

So, you know, a bunch of questions that I have here, Mr. Chair. I think some of these changes look pretty good and that I'll likely be able to support this bill, but again I'm just looking for some answers.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak? I see the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 38, and I appreciate the comments of the previous member. You know, when we look at this legislation and as the comments have reflected up to this point from members on this side of the House, there is within Bill 38, contained within this legislation, pieces that I'm happy to support and happy to see moving forward and modernizing in some instances.

On the other hand, you know, with the fact that this is an omnibus piece of legislation that affects and amends six acts, as was stated, relating to the justice system – the Jury Act, the Police Act, the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the Queen's Counsel Act, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, and the Referendum Act – I mean, it's a mouthful. The fact is that some of these are very unrelated to each other. It's frustrating when a bill comes to this Legislature like Bill 38 and we're expected to vote on it as one whole bill instead of what we should be doing in voting on these as each piece individually.

Once again, when we look at some of the changes, the amendments to the Jury Act, specifically around the idea that jury summons would now be available by electronic means, you know, looking at the idea of modernizing the justice system – and in this instance the government is saying that it will reduce costs – I'd be interested to find out what kind of cost reduction or savings we imagine seeing there.

4:30

The next question must be: where is that cost savings going to be put to use after the fact? I'm very concerned with the direction of this government in instances like changes to the lottery fund, that they've now made that program less transparent, that they've moved that back into government purview, into just general revenue, a slush fund for this government. Once again, as this government is saving costs in certain instances, what is happening with that money?

The next question, of course, when we are talking about moving important things like jury summons to be electronic, is: what is going to happen with the privacy and personal information of Albertans? How are we going to ensure that is secure? Of course, before the House right now we have amendments to the Health Information Act, and I have had the opportunity just yesterday to raise the very many concerns that I have with, first of all, the history of this Health minister and how he has used people's personal information against them, one instance of course being that he showed up on the driveway of a physician. Moving past that, there was another instance when that Health minister looked into the records of a certain health care provider and tried to use that against them in the debate of physician compensation.

So we've already seen that this government is willing to use people's personal information against them, but in this specific instance I'm most concerned about how that personal information is going to be protected from outside organizations and outside threats that may arise. Once again, looking at the amendments to the Health Information Act that we're seeing, it was quite clear – and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner made it very clear that they were not consulted. Once again, I would have to ask: when we look at changes specifically in this instance to the Jury Act, was the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner consulted? We haven't necessarily heard answers to that effect.

Once again, there are many pieces in here that overall I see myself being able to support. But when we go further – and I've had the opportunity to speak to this fact around allowing referendums during municipal elections and in some instances allowing them when there isn't even a municipal election but having it provided or done through the municipal government – there are many questions, the first one being: who was consulted on that with such a big change happening?

Of course, we saw large changes in Bill 27 in the spring session and Bill 29, changes to legislation that governs the elections in our province and the amount of money that is going to be allowed to flow through the system because of these drastic changes that the government has made. So when we talk about forcing municipalities to hold referendums in conjunction with their municipal elections, there are many questions – some of them I have been able to raise up to this point – around how that is going to affect the ability of municipalities to hold their elections. How will it affect the voter outcome and the results of those elections with the changes that they're providing?

I've made it no secret that I'm very concerned any time that this UCP government gets anywhere near our democracy. We saw in the leadership race of this government that they cannot be trusted to, you know, make the right decisions in terms of best practices. We saw a kamikaze candidate brought forward to sway the outcome and undermine the practice of their leadership election. Once again, many of the members in this very Legislature were interviewed by the RCMP in an ongoing investigation into that leadership race, and that continues on. So I have to question, as I have in the past, why those specific members here, while that investigation is still going

on, are allowed to vote on changes to our democracy and to our elections while we talk about the impact of referendums and how that might sway the outcome and how the changes in bills 27 and 29 are going to allow things like PACs, outside organizations, to come in and influence our democracy without having any real names attached to them and the changes that have been made, once again, through bills 27 and 29 to allow essentially unlimited amounts of money to flow into our elections.

You know, we look at the changes that were made that would allow an Albertan to donate \$5,000 to a single candidate, but that can happen in every constituency across the province. These are changes that are going to disproportionately support, one, incumbents and, two, people that are very well off, the wealthiest in our province. There is no way that the majority of Albertans or the majority of my constituents would be able to even fund \$5,000 to a single candidate in the first place. But to say that somebody that is well off, that is rich is able to do that across every constituency across the province is, once again, very concerning and, of course, is going to disproportionately support those who are rich and well off in our province.

So there are a lot of questions, as there were in the original legislative changes to referendums in our province around how they are administered. This government came in on a platform that said it would allow citizen-led referendums, yet the legislation and the fine print show very clearly that the Premier is the one with the final choice of how the referendums will be worded. Once again this government was elected on a commitment to do one thing but quickly changed what that one thing was going to be or quickly changed what that was in the first place, which is very concerning.

You know, we have a municipal election coming up in about a year from now, and we've already seen the kind of vitriol campaigning of certain municipal councillors. I'm not going to get into naming names. But we know that it is going to be, I would say, one of the most divisive campaigns that we've seen in the history of municipal elections. We saw the very same thing happen in Calgary in the last municipal election. There were certain parties that were backing certain mayoral candidates, and it became very divisive. The idea of allowing referendums to be chosen and written and worded by this government and then introduced on a municipal level during those elections, I imagine, will only make things more divisive. That's very worrying for me.

Once again, the government's changes to referendums earlier, that \$500,000 would be allowed to be spent on a referendum, is a lot of money that can influence an election. So while, you know, a political action committee, a PAC, might say, "Oh, we're doing this on a specific issue," it becomes very clear that there will be a candidate on one side of the issue and a candidate on the other side of the issue, and these massive amounts of money are being used to influence voters to support a specific candidate. That is greatly concerning.

Once again, when we look at the idea of this omnibus legislation, Bill 38, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, the title has very little to do with changes to the Referendum Act, yet that is one of the largest pieces of legislation and one of the largest changes that we see within this bill.

I'm greatly worried for the future of this province and the future of democracy in Alberta with the changes that this government has made through Bill 27, through Bill 29, and through this legislation, Bill 38. They are greatly trying to affect the outcomes of our elections, as they tried to do in their own leadership race.

So while there are many concerns, you know, besides the Referendum Act, I think the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview raised some important concerns around changes to QC that have not been requested or have not come from the legal

profession. That obviously is a topic that average Albertans don't necessarily know about. They're using this legislation to pass things, really, in the shadows of the night.

4:40

With that, Mr. Chair, I know that I'm going to have more opportunities to speak to this. I think that we hopefully will have some opportunities to propose ways to make this legislation better, if I'm correct, and I look forward to speaking to those further in Committee of the Whole. I will leave it at that.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members? I will recognize the associate minister of natural gas.

Mr. Nally: Morinville-St. Albert.

The Acting Chair: Morinville-St. Albert.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Chair, I had to stand up because the comments from that last member, I mean, were just offensive, and the character assassinations in his last five minutes were just disgusting.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: Now, I can appreciate, Mr. Chair, that . . .

The Acting Chair: A point of order has been called.

Go ahead, sir.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise on 23(i), (j) . . .

An Hon. Member: No (h)?

Mr. Sabir: And (h).

Essentially, the Deputy Government House Leader is making straight accusations of the member who just spoke that he was trying to character assassinate them and all those things. If there was something that the Deputy Government House Leader felt was outside of the rules, I think the Deputy Government House Leader had that opportunity to call the member to order through you, but that didn't happen. I think I would suggest that that member should refrain from making those kind of direct accusations about other members. He raised really good points that were relevant to the changes within the legislation. He shared his concern. He shared the concerns of his constituents. I don't see any of the things that the Deputy Government House Leader is trying to characterize those comments with. That didn't happen.

The Acting Chair: A chance for rebuttal?

Mr. Nally: Yes, absolutely.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Chair, clearly this is a matter of debate. You know, I sat here, and I listened to the member attack our Health minister and our Premier, and clearly it met the definition of character assassination in my books. Regardless, I think that it's quite clear that it's a matter of debate, and I'll leave it with you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

I'm prepared to rule on it. I would agree with the hon. minister. It is a matter of debate. I don't have the benefit of the Blues with

me right now, but I think he got about 10 words out of his mouth before you called a point of order. I find a hard time making a ruling that it's a point of order.

Please continue, Deputy Minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that, and if I could, through you to the hon. member, I would just encourage him to do better and remind ourselves that, you know, we can class it up. I think that that was just very disappointing to hear from an hon. member. I expect better, and I think that hon. member, through you to him, can certainly do better.

That said, Mr. Chair, I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 36 and Bill 38.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 36, Bill 38. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Members, do we concur with the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 47

Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 47? Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, go ahead.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much. I don't believe I spoke to this last night or the night before, but I'm sure the table will – I did. I just enjoyed it so much that I wanted to get up and speak a second time. All right, then.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the call.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to add some comments here on Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, one of the most ridiculous titles I've ever seen. What an oxymoron. Considering people's safety as red tape is simply disgraceful, but I don't want to linger on that. You know, I've always been very straightforward. I always get hung up on the language. What are people saying? What are people doing? Or, the other way around, what are people doing, and what are people saying? I'm not going to belabour this for too long. Otherwise, I won't get to the many other things that I do want to speak about here with regard to Bill 47.

As usual, when I start going through changes in the language – you know, one of the things that the former president of the UFCW

always taught me was to look for the bogeyman in language, and how does that affect workers' lives? Of course, I wish I could say that I was surprised. I wasn't. I only got to page 2 before I found my first concern. Looking at section 3, with regard to sections 2(2) and 5(1.1), what we're essentially doing here is limiting the number of people to choose from with regard to having them sit on a review board. What history has taught me, Mr. Speaker, in my time within the labour movement is that historically individuals that are not looking out for workers tend to sit on this board, this review.

It's always been a fight. You know, especially when workers are injured and they start making claims, they have to fight for these things. I've said this over and over and over and over again: WCB was never meant to be an adversarial system. It was never intended that workers would have to fight tooth and nail to get coverage when they're injured at work. Now, I'm not saying that due diligence doesn't need to be done, but these folks shouldn't have to go to hell and back in order to get their claims covered. What we see here, all under the guise of this nice little word that the Minister of Labour and Immigration likes to call "balance" – I remember saying this with regard to some of the other bringing balance back to the workplace. Sure, if you consider balance taking those scales, putting it on the side of the north face of Mount Everest, and calling that balance.

This is clearly tipping things in favour of employers at the expense of workers. Earlier today in my member's statement I was talking about how we are all able to do the things that we can do here in this House and everywhere else because of the millions of hard-working Albertans in this province. Yet we still continue to see workers pushed down, put at a disadvantage, and left to their own devices.

4:50

You know, one of the other things here I'll quickly – again, I didn't get very far here in the legislation. Right at the bottom here of page 4, Mr. Speaker, of Bill 47, under subsection (6)(a):

The review body may require the worker or the worker's dependant . . .

This is the important part.

. . . if the dependant is claiming compensation, to undergo a medical examination by a physician.

Now, why on earth, if you are advocating on behalf of an injured worker, do you need a medical examination? Language. What does that mean? I'll be happy if the Minister of Labour and Immigration will explain that. To me, this is all kinds of problems right there, and I'm only four pages into the legislation.

One of the other things that I'll probably spend the bulk of my time talking to is around, well, first off, the watering down of the right to refuse unsafe work. You know, Mr. Speaker, this pandemic has shown us just how at risk hard-working Albertans can be with regard to their work sites. The recent outbreaks at the JBS and Cargill meat-packing plants show that had the workers not been able to properly exercise their right to refuse unsafe work, I have a feeling the death toll would have been a lot higher. The good news was that there was language in place that these workers could call in to their employer and say: I reasonably believe that my safety is at imminent risk if I come in without some kind of changes being made.

This watering down of the right to refuse unsafe work – and I've heard the rhetoric: "Oh, we're not doing that." You are. It's in your legislation. Read it. Read what the language says and what it means. I've always suggested that I know a great course that'll help you to interpret how language is. That's what I learned.

The other big concern I have is around health and safety committees. Now, I know the press secretary from the minister of

labour's office was tweeting up a storm at me the last time I brought this, and they're welcome to do it again. The bottom line is that I have direct experience on this. Whether you like it or not, that's what happened, and it is relevant, my experience in the labour movement, serving as a relief rep for the different bargaining units that were covered from the largest private-sector union in the province, which, in my opinion, should be the minister of labour's one major stakeholder.

Just a little background, Mr. Speaker, in case anybody has forgotten. In my tenure at my job, before I became an MLA, out of a 26-year career there, I spent probably 20 years of that on my work site's health and safety committee. Out of those 20 years, I spent probably 15 of them as the co-chair along with management. Now, during that span I saw when the company took health and safety seriously, I saw when they didn't, and then I saw when they took it seriously again. Stark changes – stark changes – to how things happened.

Mr. Speaker, when I was elected to come serve the residents of Edmonton-Decore, my work site was able to boast 1,650 days accident free – 1,650 – three years without an accident because we took health and safety seriously. Now, I've always been honest about this. I remember some of my co-workers going: "Wow, this is inconvenient. These harnesses, when you're going, are uncomfortable, and they limit my motion." "But they keep you safe in a fall. I know you're uncomfortable. I know it's a little bit inconvenient, but you need to wear it."

I remember the discussions that I had with management about their premiums. I know the minister has spoken to this: we've got to help our job creators with their premiums. How about you just help them make their work site safe? When we took health and safety seriously, all of a sudden – surprise, surprise – the WCB premiums started to go down and down and down. Then I actually remember sitting in the office with management talking about how we've saved so much money now from our lower premiums because we took health and safety seriously – we made it mandatory; we ensured employees were adhering to it every single moment – that now we've got to find something to do with all the saved money, or Safeway is going to take it away from us. What a conversation to be a part of. I thought I'd fallen into the twilight zone or something like that. When I hear things like, "We have to help them because their WCB premiums are too high," I say: "Help them work safer. They'll come down on their own every time, because all it takes is one."

You know, I always remember hearing about, when they started talking about putting humans on the moon, "Oh, it can't be done; that could never happen; it's too hard," right up until they did it. A work site can be safe if you take it seriously, and you will get there. No, it's not going to happen overnight. It didn't happen overnight in my work site. But in the first year we started to see savings, in the second year we saw even more, and in the third the next thing you know we're having conversations about: well, how do we keep the parent company from taking this money away from us?

Now, this whole idea is: well, you know, if we have a common company, we can shrink down the number of health and safety committees that we can have. That is ridiculous, Minister. As someone who worked for a common company – obviously, the parent company is Safeway but Lucerne in general. We have an ice cream plant, we have a milk plant, we have a cheese plant, and we have a juice plant all under the same company. I can tell you for a fact, Mr. Speaker, that if it comes to health and safety, I would not have a clue what would be needed in either one of those plants other than ice cream, but those rules allow the company to do that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, serving as a relief rep for 401, I remember one conversation that I had on the phone. It absolutely

stunned me. I had one of the members of the store, the shop steward, call me and say: "Look, we've got a bit of a concern here. One of the security cameras in the smoke shop is not working. It's been down for a little while, and we can't seem to get any answers from management on when it's going to be fixed." I'll be honest. I thought it would just be a quick conversation with the manager. No big deal. I thought I'd call him up and say: "Hey, I hear the security camera is down in the smoke shop. I realize, you know, that I'm calling you here just after a long weekend. You probably haven't had a chance to really book anybody to come in. I was wondering if you might be able to give me an ETA on when that might be fixed, and then I can go back and I can tell the members that this is what's happening, that it'll be fine, and not to worry about it."

The answer that I actually expected was: "Yeah. We just called today. We'll hopefully have somebody in by the end of the week, and then by the beginning of next week it'll be back in order." I would have accepted an answer like that, and I would have gone back to the membership and said: "Look, it'll be fine. It'll be fixed in a week. Don't worry about it." What I got for an answer instead was, "Well, what business is it of yours?" "Excuse me. I'm the representative for the union of your workers. That's what business it is of mine."

5:00

It's that kind of an attitude that is probably why Superstore always has problems with their health and safety committees. Management keeps messing around with them. I've seen it time and time again. "Oh, yeah. Let's go have a safety committee meeting. Oh, none of the members are on shift at that time. Ah, well, sorry. I guess we'll just do it." Messing with health and safety committees messes with people's lives and their safety.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be back, and I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Decore. Obviously, we have some differences in this House. You know, there are some different experiences. I actually liked a lot of what he was saying here today. I don't necessarily agree with how he's putting it towards this bill – unfortunately, I can't get there with him – but the importance of health and safety committees? Yeah. Absolutely. The fact that safety is very important, whether it's OH and S or otherwise? Absolutely paramount. The fact that safety is a culture? I absolutely agree with you.

I never worked in one plant my entire career. I was all over the place, whether it was up in the Territories in the Arctic, whether I was bouncing across on railroad projects, dropping in fibre optics across Canada, whether I was working on pipeline projects. Again, I wasn't one of the hands on the tools. You know, as a field engineer I was out there, and as a civil engineering technologist I can't join a union. It's not part of our deal. We have some differences, but I've worked with unions, non-unions, otherwise. I've worked with the Iron Workers and Boilermakers. I mean, tons of boilermakers are what I would call mentors and friends and guided me through it. But the reason why we took safety so importantly at all the different companies that we had was productivity. See, you nailed that. The fact that we wanted to have a productive site: a safe site is a productive site, always. We would never put dollars and cents ahead of someone's life.

By the way, the Westray mine disaster changed everything for everyone. That was probably the worst incident in history where you had management that did the wrong things and didn't change them. There were miners there that lost their lives. What came out

of that? The biggest thing that stuck with me as a young field engineer coming through and taking on different positions and management and working my way up to a position where I ran multibillion-dollar projects was that I went to jail. If I didn't do the right thing, I went to jail. So did the vice-president, the president, and everybody else. The kill chain on that whole event makes it imperative that safety is taken first and foremost.

I can honestly say that at Enbridge, as an example, with our systems right across North America, if there was a safety incident, it was regional. If it affected anybody else, it went within that area, and then it went national. And if there was a third incident, we shut everything down. You want to talk about safety cultures? That's how it comes about. When there were those incidents in the middle of the night, I was the guy getting the call, jumping on an airplane and going down there to make sure that it wouldn't happen again. You're absolutely right with the cultures.

One of the best safety guys that I ever had was a former RCMP officer. Now, you might think that the RCMP would be the ones that would be the most litigious, going around and jumping around and doing those things and giving out safety tickets. It was quite the other way around. It was: thy brother's keeper. A safe site is a productive site. A clean site is a safe site. Dallas Allason was the gentleman's name; one of the best safety guys I've ever seen. We had 700 people on that job site working for about two years.

Another guy that I'm going to put a shout out to is Bruce Pickford. Now, this fellow is from Newfoundland. He looks like he's right off the set of *Sons of Anarchy*. He has the guys working on those projects like you wouldn't believe. Safety is a culture. The hands themselves often take shortcuts. It's not necessarily the management telling them to; it's a culture. You can literally go from one project site to the next, and you can see the differences in those cultures.

Again, the way I look at things with the OH and S manual, every one of those regulations is written in blood. That's drilled into our heads. I had the benefit of working with both union and non-union guys, being part of those committees as well, not as a shop steward but as the management side of it.

What I'm seeing so far in the bill that's being proposed here in the House, Mr. Speaker, is not going to compromise any of that. You can't have the safety committees – and you have to look at it in reasonableness. Depending on the project duration, the times, and also how many folks you have on site, different sites, you can't create them all the same and equal. That's where this is allowing a little bit of flexibility.

Although I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Decore's comments here, and I agree with you a hundred per cent on the culture, again, from my interpretation – and it's a matter of debate going back and forth – I don't believe we're compromising that, because I sure as heck wouldn't want any of my former colleagues, and when I say colleagues, I'm talking about the folks on the shovels, on the equipment, right through the management side of the fence, right up to the boardroom tables, being compromised because we're changing or messing with something. I don't believe that's the intent. I believe it's still sound.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has approximately 35 seconds should he choose to use it.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. I wouldn't mind. I'm happy to hear that there are stories like that. There are employers out there that take safety very seriously. I worked for one that, like I said, one minute we were safe; the next minute we weren't. Then we decided to take it seriously. But we do have companies out there that don't take it

seriously. Those are the ones I'm worried about, Minister. It's because those attitudes will not only get people hurt; they might even get people killed. We can't allow that.

The Speaker: That concludes the time allotted for 29(2)(a).

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in this House, in this particular case to speak to Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020, which is an update to labour legislation which is going to make our workplace safety and laws easier to understand, which I think are two very admirable approaches to updating some of the legislation across this province. It's going to create a more sustainable workers' compensation system for Albertans, to support them now and into the future in that safety and in the types of approaches that we have to workforce safety.

Also, Bill 47 will establish the heroes fund, which is really music, I think, to most of our ears, which provides a one-time \$100,000 benefit to families of first responders who have lost their lives in the performance of their duties. That's, I think, something that all of us in this House can stand up for, for those first responders that are there for us day in and day out, again, as we say, the people that are running towards trouble instead of away from it.

First, we're talking about OH and S, occupational health and safety, issues within this bill. The changes to the OH and S laws focus on improving health and safety outcomes while reducing red tape, two positive things that are going to come from this bill, which are going to affect not just workers but employers and everybody in this province who is going to be struggling to get back to work. We need to make sure that we cut that red tape and we reduce barriers to creating that much-needed employment in this province, not only now in terms of survival but as we focus on thriving in the future.

It's also in this bill that radiation protection laws will be incorporated into the Occupational Health and Safety Act to provide clarity for job creators and employers, noting, of course, that the Alberta Radiation Protection Act has not been significantly updated since 1985, which is a little while ago. Some of us were around then. In fact, it's an opportunity, I think, for us to focus on updating some of this, which is, obviously, the red tape component of it. Modernizing that 35-year-old law will ensure that it aligns with the latest workplace health and safety standards. Of course, we have talked about some of the small nuclear opportunities that may exist in this province, that can help us to reach sustainability in terms of our energy needs.

The previous government made extensive changes to OH and S law in 2018, which affected Albertans, who have explained that the changes brought in are frustrating and overly prescriptive and unnecessary red tape, hence the embedding of the red tape reference in this bill.

During the summer of 2020 Alberta's government directly engaged with job creators, workers, and health and safety professionals to learn about how our government can improve their various sectors, deep engagement which was really important to this process. In approaching that, the government is changing OH and S laws to make them clearer, easier to understand, and easier to follow for job creators and workers. We all know that job creators now are burdened with the task of survival as much as anything, spending a lot of time figuring out how they can access both federal and provincial programs for survival in an incredibly tough economy, having to dedicate their time to that survival task versus actually doing their business. I think that the fact that we are looking

at reducing the red tape for job creators is certainly a worthwhile and very noble task that we're undertaking here.

Our government wants to ensure that OH and S laws are easy to understand. Again, we see all too often in legislation and in regulations legalese. We want to make sure that we solidify that relationship between workers and employers, and, as the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland noted, we need to make sure that not just the employers but the workers in the field and the people that are supervising staff can understand their obligation to safety and how they execute that in the workplace, on job sites, in projects, that that is top of mind: an understandable, clear, and rational approach to providing safety for those people that work with them and for them.

5:10

To achieve this, our government will do a number of things, I think, that are very, very positive: remove duplications and redundancies throughout the act; move specific technical requirements into regulation where they can be updated from time to time as need be to ensure that we, again, deliver that flexibility; add flexibility for health and safety committees and representatives for work sites with multiple employers, such as contracting sites. We've heard in the past how that, in many cases, was onerous, where, you know, people were having to have redundant meetings on workplace safety when, in fact, what we needed was leadership. We needed adherence and leadership and understanding, right from the most recently hired employee to the supervisor that's in charge of making sure that that safety is in place.

Increasing options for health and safety committee training I think is vitally important as well. People need the training. They need to understand what that looks like. You know, I spent over two decades in the airline business, and I can tell you that in the airline business safety is at the top of the list, safety and security first. So we went through it. It was drilled through our heads about safety and how we'd deliver that not only to our staff but to our customers. I also spent a decade in the home-building business, actually, during a time when the OH and S and workplace safety was actually elevated significantly. And you know what? The employers, the employees, the supervisors, the subtrades: everybody embraced that. We worked so hard to make sure that everybody had their COR or SECOR training programs in place, and we had safety officers hired that had never been in place before, safety officers to go around and make sure that everybody understood what the obligations were. I think that that's a good thing, that we can enhance that training.

Clarifying the definition and reporting requirements for potentially serious incidents. Information about potentially serious incident reports and using those appropriately in ensuring not only that we recognize and record any incidents but that we learn from those as well.

Renaming discriminatory action complaints to disciplinary action complaints to avoid confusion with human rights laws. I think that's a good thing as well because we all want to make sure that we adhere to human rights laws, but this is different. This is a disciplinary action complaint, which I think is required in the workplace, which is concurrent with some of the other legislation we have in place to protect human rights.

Clarifying where work refusals are appropriate and streamlining the process. Dealing with work refusals: I believe that that needs to be there, that needs to be in place. My eldest son, when he went off to work on the rigs when he was 18 years old, one of the conversations I had with him – and I've spent quite a bit of time conversing with one of my constituents who lost a son to a workplace accident that was avoidable and was not done well. One of the things I said to him before he left was: if you don't feel comfortable, you need to know where you stand, and you need to

say: "I'm not comfortable with that. What are the safety regulations around this particular action?" And if you don't get an answer, I want you to feel comfortable, you have my full support and endorsement – in fact, I'll be giving you a pat on the back – if you say: no; I'm not doing that unless you actually share with me what that is.

He actually ran into that situation and actually was run off that rig. You know what? I actually congratulated him for doing the right thing, even though he got run off that job. I had some conversations – this was before I was in politics – with that company. If you looked at their website, you'd see everywhere it was all about health and safety, but they needed to know that that was not acceptable. I think we need to make sure that we have the teeth there and the will and the permission for people to know when they can do work refusals.

Removing the Radiation Protection Act. As already noted, incorporating that into this act I think is an important step.

The Workers' Compensation Act is also addressed in here. The system must be, of course, affordable, sustainable, and efficient so it's available to workers if they get ill or injured on the job. That's absolutely an obligation we want to make sure is built into this, and our government will be restoring balance and fairness to the workers' compensation system to meet the needs of workers but also the needs of job creators now and into the future. We need that balance. We need to create jobs, not put up barriers to job creation. We need to ensure that there is that balance out there, that the workers are protected through the Workers' Compensation Act but that it is not onerous, again, in terms of the paperwork, the administration of doing so, that we deliver on outcomes. The changes will ensure that the workers' compensation system is more sustainable, affordable, and fair, so workers can stay employed and access financial supports when they need it. That's important, that they can do that. If there is an incident or an injury on a work site, they know that they're going to be protected financially, particularly during these very difficult times, and doing so.

Mr. Speaker, we're listening to Albertans and addressing the areas that our job creators have identified as driving up system costs. We hear it every day from employers, you know, layering of costs from this level of government and that level of government, the next level of government, to the point where they are unsustainable in a business. Well, if their business is unsustainable, guess what? They shut their business down, all their employees lose their jobs, and then we have nothing to talk about. So we need to ensure that there's balance there. We're reversing the 2018 changes that created unsustainable costs to the system at a time where Alberta's economy was struggling. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm here to tell you that what happened in 2014, '15, '16, '17, '18, '19 pales in comparison to the challenges that our employers are going through today.

Our government will reinstate the maximum insurable earnings cap for injured workers; enable the Workers' Compensation Board to set cost-of-living adjustments for compensation benefits – that's a good thing – changing presumptive coverage for psychological injuries to only include firefighters, police officers, peace officers, paramedics, corrections officers, and emergency dispatchers; restore a voluntary system for reinstating an injured worker and reinforcing co-operation by all. That is a really important part in this. Reinstatement of injured workers is so important because people primarily want to get back to work. They need to have their compensation issues addressed, but they want to get back to work, and we need to make sure that that is front and centre in this system in terms of the changes we're making.

We'll be removing the requirements for employers having to contribute to health benefit plans for injured workers who are off

work, ensuring that there is again balance in that and not a burdening of costs on our job creators. Allowing WCB to determine level of funding must be available in the accident fund to address the needs of injured workers and, of course, to cover the costs of current claims. We need fairness, appeals advisory services, and medical panel services delivered by other existing organizations to reduce duplication. I can tell you, having been in the private sector, that duplication in the public sector is something we need to avoid. We need to actually move forward beyond that, and we need to make sure that that is not the case. That's just the additional red tape that we need to address. That's going to certainly help, again, in reducing costs to job creators at the end of the day because it is paid for by those job creators through their premiums.

Additionally, the current Fair Practices office and Medical Panels Office will be transferred to the Appeals Commission within the WCB to ensure efficiency while maintaining independence. We certainly want that independence. These changes will actually save approximately \$2.2 million per year. It's pretty clear that in this fiscal environment we're in, we need to seek savings in everything we do across government and remind ourselves, as I always do with my constituents and some of the small businesses in my constituency, that there's no such thing as government money. There are only taxpayer dollars that pay for all of us, for all of the public-sector employees and all the work and commitment that we have towards Albertans.

Some other savings. I think that's an important issue here, not just how we run things but how much it costs to run things. We'll be saving \$53 million in 2020 by reinstating the compensation cap and the way cost-of-living adjustments are calculated, a further \$230 million over the next three years by limiting presumptive coverage for psychological injuries to specific classes of workers, \$240 million in future liabilities by reinstating the cost-of-living adjustment calculation, and closing the Fair Practices office will save approximately \$1.8 million per year while maintaining core services for workers and employers. By my quick calculation that's \$524.8 million savings. Half a billion dollars of savings there: that's important as we drive towards greater fiscal responsibility in government, Mr. Speaker.

The heroes fund. This is obviously, I think, near and dear to most of our hearts. We've seen the losses of those heroes, those first responders in our community. This is not going to necessarily take care of everything for it, but this is a way for us to assist their families when we have the tragedy of a loss of first responders, who again are those that run towards trouble not away from it. Eligible first responders will include firefighters, police officers, sheriffs, paramedics, and correctional officers, which is, I think, a real tip of the hat to those professions.

5:20

The fund is a platform and a Budget 2020 commitment, so we'll be ticking off another one of those 375 commitments and making sure that we deliver that to Albertans, and we'll be the only province in the country with such a program for families of first responders, so I think we should all be very proud of that as we move to passing this legislation.

There have been 106 Alberta first responder fatalities over the last decade, 90 per cent being firefighters due to occupational illness, so that is something that we need to address as well in this bill, in these changes. There is no higher form of public service than to risk one's life to maintain public safety, and Alberta's government wants to honour that. While I'm at that, maybe we'll reference some of the conversations about defunding.

Mr. Speaker, this is a really great bill, and I certainly will be supporting it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order (29)(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or a comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has the call.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 47, what the government is calling Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020. You know, if we took the government's word for it, from the last speaker and the previous government speaker as well, things in this bill are perfect and are going to be so great for employees across the province. There are no issues here. Unfortunately, it really shows what place this government comes from, and that's a place of great privilege, because through the stories that they've shared about how great every employer is across the province and all the work sites that they ever worked on and managed have been so perfect and safety could never be better, we don't even need labour legislation. Everyone is doing great work out there.

Unfortunately, from my time in the construction industry and from the stories that come through my office and that I've heard over the years, it is a completely different story than what this government is trying to paint. Specifically, I think back to one employer that I had, who would use every trick in the book to, first of all, avoid paying us fair compensation for things like overtime. Of course, this government earlier in this session made changes to averaging agreements so that employers can change when an employee is paid overtime. I had an employer that would use that against us all the time and, you know, call themselves a factory in the construction industry, so they wouldn't have to pay us overtime till after 44 hours. We'd be working several hours past what a standard day should look like, upwards of 15, 16 hours. It was unbelievable.

[Ms Glasgo in the chair]

I think of another instance that came up where a worker, who was drinking on the job, first of all, which is one thing that wasn't handled properly in that workplace, from drinking put everyone's life at risk in that instance and, second of all, was doing dangerous work around other workers. In this instance he exploded a compressed tank and, first of all, injured himself to the point where he was unable to even walk for several weeks, was put in a wheelchair or was barely able to walk, blew both of his heels right out and was unable to carry out the duties of his job, and, unfortunately, also hurt another person in that situation. The fact is that, one, the rules aren't strong enough in the first place, and, second of all, the workers don't fully understand these rules. The employers do their best to not follow these rules. There was no real safety procedure moving forward. There wasn't fair compensation. Unfortunately, in these situations this government is actually going forward and making changes that say that in an instance, potentially that one but, you know, in many other instances, where a worker is injured, they would not actually have to keep that worker on board.

Of course, in that instance it was the workers, you know, not following proper safety and not taking care of his fellow brothers and sisters in the workplace, but in many other instances these things happen by accident, by no fault of their own, of the workers. So while this government is going ahead and saying that everything is great, that this is perfect for both employees and employers – unfortunately, when we look at the details and the idea that, first of all, this government is going to remove the requirement of an employer to continue paying a worker who has been injured, for the most part, at no fault of their own probably, it's absolutely frustrating that they are unwilling to talk about that fact, that they are saying that this is somehow a good thing.

We hear words like “balanced,” “responsible,” “reducing costs,” but the fact is that when this government is talking about reducing costs, what they’re really saying is that they’re reducing the payouts to injured Albertans. We see very similar language being used by the Finance minister when we talk about Bill 41 and the caps to compensation for somebody that receives a concussion through a collision. This government says: oh, we’re expanding medical coverage. Now, you know, you’ll only get paid \$5,000 instead of having the right to sue. Once again, we see in this legislation that this government has a vendetta against injured Albertans, whether they’re drivers, whether they’re workers. No matter what, your compensation for being injured is going down because of the decisions of this government.

You know, I’ve watched the social media release by this minister, in the particular instance that I’m thinking about, on the heroes fund that this government is coming up with, which seems to be the main piece that the labour minister is going out on social media and touting while removing all of these other important rights and benefits for injured workers. This is one piece that he’s willing to stand up and talk about how great it is. In this instance the minister of labour recorded a video and put it on social media and actually disabled the ability for people to comment on that video, and I’m quite sure that that was done because he knew the type of feedback and the type of blowback that he was going to get. Indeed, while he was able to limit the comments, the blowback still came in. It’s absolutely unbelievable.

This minister knows exactly what he’s doing. He knows the effect that it’s going to have on employers. He knows that when we talk about, once again, the idea of reducing costs to the system, we’re actually talking about reducing fair compensation to injured workers in many cases, that did this through no fault of their own, that potentially should have refused unsafe work, who went forward with it. Of course, we can talk about the fact that this government and that labour minister are trying to weaken that ability as well, which we’ve heard about on the opposition side many times before here. Unfortunately, this government just does not care about keeping these important occupational health and safety and labour protections in place.

We’ve heard stories about the idea of changes to presumptive PTSD coverage. You know, the minister once again stood up, I believe, last evening. I have to appreciate that the minister is standing up, but the fact is that the answers that we are getting are not good enough. They’re not good enough for the opposition. They’re not good enough for the Albertans who are going to be injured in the future, who are going to have their benefits capped.

We have many Albertans across this province who have the benefit, you know, more likely before the global oil price crash and before the pandemic – I know that in my past work in the construction industry there were journeymen, if they were working overtime, which many of them do when they’re up in work camps or even in their own community, that were making above \$100,000 a year. Instead of protecting that overtime pay, first of all, in past legislation, once again, we have this government changing the ability of workers to protect their overtime through the changes to averaging agreements. But even further, if that worker is able to continue making that much money with those changes and if they are injured, this government is actually going to cap their benefits to top out at \$98,000, what their wage would be considered, even if they are making \$120,000, \$140,000. Once again, this minister is saying that they’re reducing costs, that they’re going to make the industry better, but unfortunately it is entirely on the backs of injured workers.

The minister yesterday used terms like: workers couldn’t focus because the legislation was too prescriptive. The previous member

said – it just goes on; the buzzwords that they’re using are absolutely ridiculous – that the workers couldn’t focus because the idea of safety committees are too prescriptive. It’s absolutely – I don’t even know what to call it, but it’s insanity, in my opinion, Madam Speaker. You know, the changes that they’re making to these work site health and safety committees: we made those changes recognizing that when employees are involved in the conversations about protecting other workers, about creating a culture of safety in the workplace, that benefits everyone.

5:30

Once again, this government says, “Oh, those protections don’t need to be in place; we can walk them back,” even though the changes of our NDP government put us in the middle of the pack. They didn’t put us leading in most cases, if any cases. We really took us to a place of trying to find a real balance, unlike this government, who is putting the balance entirely in the hands of the employer. We tried to find that balance, but this government is using terms like, you know, “These workplace safety committees are too prescriptive” or “These protections of ensuring that there’s fair compensation for an injured Albertan are too strong.” It’s absolutely unbelievable.

Once again, I believe the previous member spoke about making it easier to understand. Workers want to know that those protections are going to be in place. Once again, this government, coming from a place of privilege and talking about how great of an employer they are – and I hear members laughing like the idea of privilege is funny. But when we have people that come to our province, potentially as temporary foreign workers, potentially as underemployed workers, for many other reasons that people come, and expect these protections to be in place and need those protections, things like being able to refuse unsafe work, being able to get fair compensation if they’re injured, this government is weakening that ability of those workers to get that. Just because somebody doesn’t understand the legislation that is in place for them, it doesn’t mean that they should not be fairly compensated.

Once again, to say that it was too prescriptive, that the language was too strong or too hard to understand is simply unacceptable because, at the end of the day, employers have a responsibility to understand the law, to uphold the law, and to follow through with their side of the deal if a worker is injured.

Once again, as the previous member from the government, you know, ran through the list of changes that they’re making, made it sound like they’re all good, I believe that the idea of the removal of a requirement for an employer to continue paying health benefits for one year following an accident may have been somewhere in there underneath words like “finding fairer balance for employers and employees.” Unfortunately, these changes, what we’re talking about here, potentially affecting a single parent, maybe a single mother like my own, who is injured on the site, who would potentially have benefits like dental coverage or a health spending account – this government, not only in this legislation, is going to say that the employer who had this injury happen on their job site no longer has to employ that single mother; further, their benefits like dental, that their children need so badly, are going to disappear.

It’s unbelievable, yet this government, one after the other, stands up and says that these are the right decisions, that this is going to, you know, create sustainability, much like the sustainability that we see in AISH as right now they’re trying to claw back \$300 from people with severe disabilities, as we see the minister of seniors clawing back important benefits from seniors. You can look at pretty much every ministry in this House, and unfortunately they only listen to the direction of this Premier, which is often taking away rights from vulnerable people, and in this instance, through

Bill 47, Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, 2020, as this government is calling it, it is on the backs of injured workers. It's absolutely unbelievable. The fact that the previous member stood up and said all of it with a smile on his face is absolutely unbelievable.

Now, you know, I talked about the idea of limiting the ability of work site health and safety committees to represent workers if they are injured, the removal of the requirement for an employer to co-operate with that joint work site health and safety committee or representative, the reduction of responsibilities and checks and balances on employers. The list goes on and on. Everything in here is an absolute disaster, mainly for injured workers. I can see why employers in some instances are going to absolutely love this.

Unfortunately, while we do have amazing employers who go above and beyond what is in this legislation, that is not what we should be focused on as a government. We don't need to worry about those employers as much who already go above and beyond. Just like when we do things like raise the minimum wage, we're not trying to punish people who already go above and beyond that, you know, the many family businesses out there who already support their workers to a higher extent than that. We are talking about lifting all boats. We are trying to ensure that the bad actors are held accountable.

You know, we have had this conversation about the sustainability of WCB, and it is an important conversation that we have to have, and in the midst of a pandemic we need to do our best to ensure that the environment that we are creating for both employers and employees is balanced, and this government has been very one sided with their \$4.7 billion handout to the largest corporations, their changes to payroll taxes, their changes to being able to pay youth lower than the minimum wage. This government has done a wonderful job of giving employers everything that they could ever imagine, and unfortunately, despite all of that, even before the pandemic we saw, with this government in power, 50,000 jobs lost. Up to this point I believe we have 290,000 Albertans, if I'm correct, unemployed and waiting for any opportunity to get back to work. Unfortunately, the changes that we're seeing in this legislation are not going to create workplaces that are beneficial to workers. It is completely one sided.

Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve a government that has their backs and will invest in people. Unfortunately, that is not what we are seeing here. We are seeing the exact opposite.

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have risen and spoken to this bill. I want to just take a moment to recognize some of the comments and address some of the questions or issues that were raised. First off, to the Member for Edmonton-Decore, I fully agree that health and safety – and this is the same point that was made by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland – culture is critically important. Healthy workplaces, safe workplaces are productive workplaces.

Madam Speaker, you know, there are suggestions made by the opposite side that we're making changes to occupational health and safety that will reduce outcomes. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our focus is actually on improving outcomes. Quite frankly, those outcomes have been flat for the past five years even with the changes made.

It's been suggested by the other side, Madam Speaker, that we are taking health and safety laws back 50 years, back to the 1970s in nondeveloped countries – I think that was the term used earlier

today – but let's actually examine that for a second here. Let's test its verity, right? We can look back at 2015. That's not 50 years ago. That's just five years ago. Was there in 2015 a requirement that there be health and safety committees for organizations that have more than 20 employees? No. That didn't exist, but does that exist in Bill 47? Yes, it does. Was there a requirement in 2015 that organizations with more than 20 employees had to have a health and safety program? No, it didn't exist. But guess what? It's here in Bill 47. Let's talk about potentially serious incidents. Was there a requirement in 2015 that employers report potentially serious incidents to government? No, there was not. But is it here in Bill 47? Yes, it is.

Madam Speaker, the narrative being brought by the other side that this is turning back the clock 50 years is simply not the case. What we are doing here in the changes to the occupational health and safety legislation is maintaining the core and key functions. These health and safety committees didn't exist or there wasn't a requirement for them even five years ago. It was brought in by the previous government, and we said: yes, they should be here. But it was so prescriptive. What we heard from health and safety professionals was that it was too prescriptive and that the process was taking away the focus of identifying risks and addressing those risks in the workplace.

We're taking it out of the act, Madam Speaker, and we're going to put much of it back into the code, where it belongs, with flexibility for employers and workers to be able to use it appropriately to address the issues that they identify. On the occupational health and safety side we are making the changes to improve safety outcomes because we are focused on the health and safety of Alberta workers. The framework is still there.

5:40

Now, Madam Speaker, I'd like to speak a little bit to some of the points raised by the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, who suggested that the balance that we're seeking in the legislation is not a balance at all and suggested that when they were in office and made changes, they just brought our labour laws, including workers' compensation, to the middle of the pack. Well, let's again test the verity of that.

Let's talk about one of the issues that they raised associated with that in regard to the cap on maximum insurable earnings. Madam Speaker, I can tell you that, with the exception of one province, who is reversing this right now, there's not another single province that does not have a cap. Every other province has a cap in the country. This government – we're putting it back in place, but the previous government changed it. They removed that cap. Is that balance, in the middle of the pack? No, it's not.

Here's what they did, removing the cap. Yes, it provided benefits, higher benefits for a small percentage of workers, but look at the cost, the increased cost. The cost is not only in terms of the price of paying for the insurance premiums, Madam Speaker; the cost is in jobs. As we know, as you increase the costs on job creators, all else being equal, you decrease the opportunities for jobs for Albertans.

Now, Madam Speaker, that is what our government, this government, is focused on. We are bringing balance back. We're pulling our workers' compensation legislation back into line on this issue, and that's what we're focused on.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: There are four seconds left in Standing Order 29(2)(a), and that time has expired.

Any other members wishing to speak on Bill 47? The opposition spoke last time, so the government – I will call on . . .

Ms Goehring: He wasn't standing up.

The Acting Speaker: He was.

I will call on the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah. The four seconds under 29(2)(a) – I was a little bit too quick out of the blocks. But the member for – I want to say Mill Woods, but I always mess that up. She can definitely go after me.

[The Speaker in the chair]

An Hon. Member: Castle Downs.

Mr. Getson: Castle Downs? All right. Perfect. We'll get that sorted.

Mr. Speaker – I just want to make sure we get the shift change – the Member for Edmonton-West Henday had said something here, and I think I need to correct it, actually. The MLA eloquently made a point that the only reason why we're making these decisions is because we, while humbly, all come from a place of privilege, apparently. Normally, as Conservatives, we don't carry around our little red wagon and tell you about all the bad things that ever happened in our lives or what our experiences were. We kind of leave that behind. The opposition tends to make assumptions, perhaps. I wouldn't assert as to why they say certain things or why they assume things, but I would assume that that's kind of where they're coming from. They may not know our histories or what our backgrounds are or the places from which we look at things and what lens we come through.

So for the benefit of the others – and I normally don't tell anybody about my history, but I'm going to go down that a little bit because when I'm talking about Bill 47, reducing red tape and tweaking up the OH and S and covering off some of the other items, it's from that place, Mr. Speaker.

I grew up on a farm. It wasn't a rich farm. It was a mixed farm. We didn't have much at all, but we got by, and the way that we got by, Mr. Speaker, was working. When the other folks are talking about these long hours of 10 or 12 hours a day, well, that was a cake walk when I grew up. I grew up around equipment. I was driving my first gravel truck, a nice three-tonne old Ford, 1960-something, with a 390 in it and Eaton shift on it, at nine years old, hauling silage because my dad couldn't afford to hire any farm hands. I grew up around that.

Then I graduated out of that. We'd gone on to mixed farming. We had our own sawmill, so I grew up on the sawmill. Now, it wasn't a nice, big, fancy sawmill that some folks may have worked in, the bigger ones. It was a little old head rig, and I had to run the actual power unit for it. I was the tail sawyer, my father sawed, and my younger brother, who was four years younger than me, well, he was the canter. We grew up around dangerous equipment the whole time.

Then in the wintertime I, you know, started getting a little bit older, and then I started running logging crews for my Uncle Ronnie. So at about 19 years old I'm running crews back in the bush, hand-falling trees, lying skidders, doing all of that. This place of privilege, apparently, that I'm at – well, Mr. Speaker, it takes a lot of hard work to get to a place of privilege.

At the age of 16 I told my dad: you know, it's great working for you, Dad, and doing all that, but I'm going to have to get some experience for my resumé. So I came to Edmonton. I had 17 bucks, a bag of cookies, and a sandwich. I ended up getting hired on at a job because I knew somebody there, and I was a labourer on an asphalt crew. For the next week I slept in parks, found different

places, didn't have, you know, workboots and those types of things, but those business owners took me under their wing.

The gentleman was actually up from that Falher country, and he was a farm kid that ended up building up his own business, too. I found out he didn't have boots, didn't have a social insurance card number, didn't have any of these other types of things and kind of took me under his wing and helped me out. Then that guy kept inviting me back every summer to come back and run equipment, eventually run his paving crews.

After I went to college, I ended up hiring on with an estimator. I've run around sawmills, the logging industry, did those things. To pay for myself to go to college, I actually took money out of my account that I had saved up, got a logging permit, went out there and had my own logging operation going so I could pay for it. I found out the hard way about making bad business deals. The guy that was supposed to buy my wood: it turned out it was a bad deal. He wouldn't pay up, so then I had to really, really dig in deep, Mr. Speaker.

Then for the next year in my college I'm eating tin cans of beans and maybe some tomatoes here and there. Every once in a while I'd splurge and buy a hamburger every month or so. These are the types of things that we did: the paving industry, farming. Oh, yeah, and then I got into the industrial industry after college. Now, I'm privileged. I'm really privileged, Mr. Speaker, because this was just bequeathed to me. I got hired on to a really good project up in the middle of the tundra in the Territories, and this was a game changer for me. This was when I actually got to see how these different cultures and all my background experience to that point, that I'd gotten by the sweat of my brow and some really good people that saw me working and swept me up and carried me along and mentored me, how this went to work.

Well, now I get assigned to the ironworkers, and we're putting up a superstructure. I'm tacked in with these guys, and they're informing me and advising me how this goes together. Safety was always paramount. So now I'm a project co-ordinator for a major industrial company working in all the tundra. For that same company I end up working in their pipeline division, so I end up working doing fibre optics around CP Rail, going right across the country, and again I kept advancing through these things. So the lens that I'm looking through from that point, again, is from safety, from being the person on the tools, the kid out in the bush dropping trees, being responsible for others, and making sure that I have all my fingers and toes.

My uncle Ron: I was working for him when he was at Western Caissons. He used to run the rigs over there, the drilling rigs. He'd give you a little saying of: never stick your finger where you wouldn't stick, well, something else. Those little safety tricks that came along the way were from a different culture. It kept people safe, because when you're out in the field and you have those coarse types of languages – some of my colleagues are kind of smiling a bit – it drills it home to the folks in the hand that you're watching out for each other. It's those little memory hooks that make sure that you think twice before something bad happens.

I ended up over at Enbridge, Leduc Industrial, Leduc fibre and pipelines. Then I ended up over at Enbridge. There I went over as an analyst, and within a couple of years all of a sudden I'm a senior manager of planning and execution, responsible for project teams all the way from Norman Wells down to Chicago; Montana tie-line; windmill generation in Lethbridge; trans shipment facilities down in Easton, Pennsylvania; engineering teams in Colorado; Wichita, Kansas; New Orleans. I had two project teams, one out of Superior, Wisconsin, and the other one out of Enbridge. I lived out of my suitcase. My wife saw me maybe six days a month. The reason why I was gone so much, Mr. Speaker, wasn't because I didn't have the

opportunity to sit in a corner office, because I did. I was never there because the project is in the hands, and that's what was important. I went to where I was needed to ensure that it was running safely.

Again, when we're talking about these things, this place of privilege, it's because we've had experiences. The Member for Edmonton-West Henday was talking about a gong show, quite honestly, of who he worked for. I can rest assured for that young man, that MLA – I shouldn't say an age or anything else. If he was that young man at that age working there, he should have definitely reported something and taken care of it, because no business like that should have the business of being in business. Workers' rights are paramount to us. Again, I talked about the Westray mine disaster. As management I know that's the case.

So what are we offering here? We're actually making it easier, as the minister so eloquently put it. We're cutting some of the red tape in the OH and S items. We're not getting rid of the safety committees. We're right-sizing the safety committees so they're more effective. We're looking at modernizing the 35-year-old radiation law. Again, if we're talking baby nukes and we're talking a bunch of other things that we need to, we need to modernize this. It's 35 years old, for crying out loud.

We're following through on the heroes' benefits, again, those folks that we've supported all the way along, not talking about defunding or otherwise. We've always supported them. Those folks step out there, and in the chance that something terrible happens to them, their families are taken care of. That's what we're wanting to do. The OH and S side: we're removing duplication and redundancy, we're removing the technical requirements for regulation, we're adding flexibility, increasing the option for health and safety committee training – increasing: you heard that correctly, Mr. Speaker – clarifying definitions and reporting requirements for potentially serious incidents, and information from potentially serious incident reports will not be used for enforcement purposes.

5:50

Again, making sure that the culture is right. When you start driving attitudes and behaviours, reporting goes down, and the culture gets worse. You want to be able to report and to make sure that these things come to the top so that you can have your key performance indicators, your early warning signs, before you have a serious incident or fatality. Again, there's a nice pyramid. You have only so many chances, so many strikes, before something serious happens. This helps facilitate that before something happens and doesn't drive that culture underground. Renaming "discriminatory action complaints" to "disciplinary action complaints" to avoid confusion with human rights laws: again, clarity. Clarity.

WCB, a fantastic system. It has to be sustainable. Employers and employees are both motivated to make sure that you have safe job sites so that you can continue working. You want your premiums low as an employer because that is paramount to your competitive advantage. As the Member for Edmonton-West Henday pointed out, as an employee you don't want to be in those areas where there are bad safety things taking place. Again, the two are symbiotic. If I'm going to be productive and have a good site, I need a safe workplace. Oh, and by the way, if I'm the manager of those, I need to make sure that gong show isn't taking place. Everyone has seen *Happy Gilmore* and the T-shirt and running shoes crowd out there shooting off nail guns; that would be the first guy that would get run off a site. It doesn't happen in the real world, and if it is happening, then it should be taken care of pretty quick.

Removing requirements for employees to have to contribute to health benefit plans for injured workers: a lot of these things are pretty innocuous. We're actually making changes. We want this act

to work. We want to make sure that things are cleaned up. We want to make sure that it flows effectively and that those health and safety committees are effective. My place of privilege of having worked through those tools, done all of those things, paid for myself to go to college, after eating my cookies after a week of living in the park: this is what I see as that manager who took care of multibillion-dollar projects, again, responsible for their health and safety, going out and flying to those sites and doing the incident reports, making the changes, running off the people that were bad, dealing with union contractors and non-union contractors alike and even union bosses. If you want to do a call, call Pat Gillespie on the east coast. Ask him if he knows Shane Getson. We were building projects down on that end doing tons of things.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I strongly suggest everybody support the bill and turn off some of the rhetoric from next door because we do have a point of precedence here where, I guess, privilege wasn't bestowed upon us. We actually earned it and worked for it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak under 29(2)(a). There are a number of changes that are contained in this piece of legislation that are deeply, deeply concerning. Every time when we hear the other side speak – I will say that most employers are good. They go above and beyond what's in the legislation. That has bearing on employers' productivity. I wholeheartedly agree that there are many employers in Alberta who may go above and beyond what's in the legislation to look after their employees. When we put these things in place, these are just kind of last-resort things so that we have some standards in place for those that do not follow them. We have some laws in place, we have some mechanism in place so that when employers don't follow those, and we have something to fall back on.

The changes contained in this piece of legislation include a host of new caps and benefit reductions that will mean that workers on WCB will get less. We can give many examples of that. Many examples of that.

For instance, this bill will result in capping the maximum insurable earnings. What that means is that if an Albertan earns a high income in a job that can be potentially dangerous – it will be the government who will make that decision – since they make too much, they will get less than what they are getting today. For instance, I will go to oil and gas jobs. Oil and gas jobs are often very high-paying, good jobs, but at the same time they do come with certain risks as well. The government talks about how they're standing up for industry all the time. But with this piece of legislation what they're doing is that the workers who work in that industry will get less compensation than they are entitled to today. That's the practical effect of the changes that are contained in this piece of legislation with respect to maximum insurable earnings. I'm sure that the minister can correct me if I'm wrong on that.

The second thing. The government is also removing some presumptive coverage for psychological injuries, where a worker experiences traumatic events, and they're limiting it to only a selected few occupations. We do know that psychological injuries are possible in many workplaces and many occupations. I wouldn't be wrong if I said "any workplace." The impact of the changes contained in this piece of legislation is that this bill will limit who is entitled to those presumptive coverages. For instance, under this piece of legislation, if a police officer and social worker both attend some emergency situation, a death of a . . .

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

Is there anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 47? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and respond to Bill 47, a very important piece of legislation that impacts occupational health . . .

The Speaker: I would be happy to hear from the hon. member; however, she was the second speaker immediately following the minister and, as such, has already spoken to Bill 47.

Is there anyone else? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to talk about Bill 47. I've heard some interesting things

coming out of the discussion today, especially from the minister himself when he said that they're doing these changes to make life better. I question: better for whom? I would argue that it is not for Alberta workers. This legislation is clearly – he actually said that he's improving outcomes but didn't say for whom. I would question if it's for Alberta workers, because when we look at this piece of legislation, it doesn't support working Albertans.

There are so many things in this legislation that are concerning. I mean, we're in the middle of a global pandemic at a time when workers are stressed, and we know what can happen when stress occurs. Injuries can occur.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca