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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, November 18, 2020

Day 67

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 18, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 48

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

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2).

Time is money. Time waits for no one. Lost time is never found again. Time is the most valuable thing a person can spend. These are just some of the sayings that describe the value of time. Red tape is a silent robber of time. If time is as important to members of this House as it is to other Albertans, then the passage of this time will happen in a timely fashion.

Bill 48 reflects our government's commitment to cutting red tape and moves us one step closer to making Alberta the freest, fastest moving economy in North America. The changes we are making are common-sense changes and are designed to get out of the way of our job creators so they can do what they do best, create jobs and jump-start our economy. One of the main goals of my small but tenacious associate ministry is getting government out of the business of other people's business, of decluttering Albertans' lives.

Mr. Speaker, a year and a half ago we set out on a bold path to make Alberta the freest, fastest moving economy in North America. In order to do that, we needed to identify how deep the problem was, so we counted. We counted all the statutes. We counted all the regulations. We counted all the policies. We counted all the forms. We didn't just count the government departments; we counted all of the agencies, boards, and commissions as well. The effort was monumental. The result was sobering.

We found out that Albertans were saddled with 670,977 regulatory hoops that they were required to jump through. That's the elephant in the room, Mr. Speaker. But how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. In the first year we were able to carve off over 52,470 pinch points. To put that into perspective, we were able to beat our goal of 5 per cent reduction and achieve a 6.2 per cent net reduction. In comparison to other jurisdictions that have also tackled the red tape elephant, we have outperformed them by three times.

Not only were we able to reduce overall baseline count, but we were able to reduce the compliance cost of doing business in Alberta as well by over \$476 million. Again, those savings are about three times higher than comparable jurisdictions in Canada and the United States. But the most important thing, Mr. Speaker, is that our first-year successes put us well on our way to becoming the freest, fastest moving economy in North America, which will make Alberta very attractive to investors. As you know, when people invest in Alberta, good jobs accompany those investments.

Bill 48 is a step towards our goal of getting Albertans back to work and jump-starting our economy. This bill proposes changes to 12 pieces of legislation across eight different ministries. Changes to several acts will save time and money for our businesses and for

our job creators. This is critical right now. The most impactful amendments are designed to encourage investment and economic growth. If passed, changes to the Municipal Government Act will speed up approvals and remove extra regulatory burdens for Albertans. These changes include speeding up timelines for subdivisions and development permit approvals; creating greater certainty for developers by removing the ability of municipalities to take additional reserve land beyond the standard amount from developers for municipal purposes; strengthening accountability and transparency on off-site levies, resulting in less money and time spent on litigation. These changes continue the work that began with our first red tape implementation bill in the fall of 2019 to conduct a line-by-line review of the MGA. Overall, they will provide needed certainty to these job creators.

In addition, amendments to the Municipal Government Act will implement a platform commitment known as the Golden Girls Act. This replicates a best practice from the province of Ontario that supports unrelated seniors who want to live in the same household. In Ontario a municipality bylaw prevented a group of seniors from doing just this.

Another smart regulation change includes amending the New Home Buyer Protection Act, which will save Alberta builders and home buyers about \$2.7 million per year by getting rid of the duplicative building assessment reports for new condominiums and residential conversions. These reports add about \$400 to the price of a new condo for an Albertan and don't provide any value because the same information is collected by the Condominium Property Act and the Safety Codes Act. As a result, this change will not compromise safety. Permits, inspections, and new-home warranties remain in place to make sure condo buildings are safe. Getting rid of these reports reduces costs for home builders and frees them up to do what they do best, build communities and create jobs for Albertans.

Bill 48 will amend several additional acts that will make life better for Albertans by reducing wait times and increasing access to important information. For example, amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act will improve access to adoption records and information for adult adoptees and family members. Current adoption legislation in Alberta is complex and creates barriers for families wanting to adopt. These amendments will make it easier for families to navigate this process and will increase accountability of adoption agencies to parents. Family is a source of identity for all of us, and for some Albertans who are adopted, their history can be hard to find. The changes in the postadoption registry will give adoptees and their families access to more information regarding their family history, and in some cases this information could be life-saving.

A smart regulation amendment is proposed to the Historical Resources Act that will eliminate the registered historic resource designation to remove unnecessary burdens for property owners. The registered historic resource designation offers little value to protecting historic properties and resources and hasn't been used since 2004. Municipal historic resource and provincial history resource designation programs provide greater protection to historic sites and offer matching government grants for conservation work. By eliminating the registered historic resource designation, owners of properties with this designation will no longer have to spend time on inconsequential paperwork.

Speaking of inconsequential paperwork, a proposed amendment to the Alberta Centennial Medal Act will repeal several sections of the legislation that are no longer needed. These changes do not diminish the medal's status as an official honour. The Alberta Centennial Medal Act was created to allow the government to award medals in honour of the province's 100th birthday.

Another amendment will have direct cost savings for authorized medicine sales outlets. This change will remove the need to have a certified expert available during business hours to sell low-risk drugs to Alberta's livestock producers. Even though qualification certificates are no longer required, there should be no loss of staff. On average, this will save these outlets more than \$14,000 per year.

The Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act will provide clear rules and better processes for professional regulatory organizations to help protect Albertans from incompetence and business fraud. In simple terms, these amendments will define public interest and public safety more clearly.

Under the theme improving service delivery, its changes propose to repeal the outdated and unnecessary authority for universities to demand and seize the unclaimed bodies of deceased persons. Alberta's universities receive bodies for research and study through donation, and it will no longer be necessary to force correctional institutions, medical examiners, and others to hand over bodies.

Additional amendments to improve service delivery include clarifying the Maintenance Enforcement Act to prevent confusion over registration in the maintenance enforcement program and amending the Land Titles Act to cut red tape and reduce delays to create certainty for people buying and selling property in Alberta. This change legislates a queue system for land title registrations to allow parties to close their real estate transactions once they've submitted their registration documents rather than making them wait until the registration process is complete, which can be up to 10 days later.

Bill 48 also proposes a service delivery improvement with the land and property rights tribunal act, which will mean faster decisions on land rights disputes. This proposed legislation amalgamates the Municipal Government Board, the New Home Buyer Protection Board, the Land Compensation Board, and the Surface Rights Board into one single public agency. This change will not affect landowners' rights or existing applications. Those who have already submitted materials won't have to take any additional steps. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, this change will allow these boards and agencies to share labour resources and speed up turnaround time

7:40

Finally, by amending the Wills and Succession Act, Albertans would be able to designate their non insurance plan beneficiaries electronically such as online or through e-mail. This change will make it easier for the plan or policy owner to designate a beneficiary. This change is similar to other changes the province has made to help Albertans especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The change will also reduce red tape by providing consistency as Albertans can already designate a beneficiary electronically for insurance benefits.

This concludes my overview of Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, but I want to leave with this. Last year the Premier went down to Texas to sell Alberta and to share our province's value proposition. He told the investment community that Alberta was open for business and that we would do everything in our power to make Alberta the freest, fastest moving economy not just in Canada but in North America. This bill along with the recently tabled red tape reduction report provide the Premier with fodder for his canon so that he can go back to those investors and show them that he wasn't just speaking political speak. He can show them hard evidence that we are on the hunt to become the freest, fastest moving economy in North America.

The gloves are off, Mr. Speaker. We will go toe to toe with any jurisdiction for those scarce investment dollars because we are all

in when it comes to getting Albertans back to work and jump-starting our economy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has moved second reading of Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2), another omnibus bill that puts together a number of unrelated pieces of legislation, which includes some minor changes that were historically contained in miscellaneous statutes acts, and then hidden under that are substantial changes that should have been brought forward by the ministers responsible for those changes. As MLAs we should have been afforded opportunity to discuss those changes in detail.

The number of changes that the minister highlighted: those are the changes, I would say, that belong to miscellaneous statutes acts and don't need a minister designated to bring forward those changes. Other than that, it amends the Alberta Centennial Medal Act, it amends the Animal Health Act, it amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, it amends the Fatality Inquiries Act, it amends the Historical Resources Act, it amends the land and property rights tribunal act, it amends the Land Titles Act, it amends the Maintenance Enforcement Act, it amends the Modernized Municipal Government Act, it amends the Municipal Government Act, it amends the New Home Buyer Protection Act, it amends the Post-secondary Learning Act, it amends the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, and it amends the Wills and Succession Act. It almost took me two, three minutes just to read the headings of legislation that this act amends, and essentially it doesn't leave you two minutes to discuss each of those changes. As I said, some of those changes we could have just included in a miscellaneous statutes act and did not have to be part of this bill.

But there are other changes that are substantial. I was listening to the minister's remarks. Somehow all these changes will result in the freest and fastest-moving economy in North America. I think we do need the economy moving. We need a freer economy that can compete, that can create jobs, that can bring investment, but quite frankly there's nothing in this bill for the UCP government to celebrate. If it was to create a single job other than the minister's job, which I also consider as red tape, it didn't create a single job.

So far as to this freest and fastest-moving economy in North America what we have seen is \$4.7 billion, the biggest corporate handout in North America, I can say, that didn't create any jobs, that didn't bring any investment. I know that the government side would say that we are in the middle of a global pandemic, and that's the reason for all the problems facing our economy, but when we look at their record prepandemic, things were not looking up either.

Before the pandemic because of this government's policies, we lost 50,000 jobs; 50,000 Albertans lost jobs before the pandemic under this government's watch. We saw the government's deficit double from the projected deficit under our government, \$12 billion, we saw investment moving away from Alberta, we saw this government slashing programs that were put in place to diversify our economy, and we saw the government repeat over and over and over again that somehow their trickle-down economic policies of giving \$4.7 billion to the wealthiest will fix everything, every problem that our economy is facing.

Even those who coined these terms, those who brought forward these policies, institutions like IMF, World Bank, even now they

are saying that these policies do not work. Even when those policies were put forward, there were certain conditions attached to those policies for them to work.

7:50

Those kinds of tax reductions were only applicable or may have yielded some benefits at times when economies are growing fast, when there is a shortage of capital, or businesses are looking for some more capital for investments. If at that point you drop the tax rate, that frees up some money that goes back into the economy that creates economic activity that creates jobs. But if you cut tax rates at a time when the economy is already in a recession, there is no economic activity. Those breaks only go for share buybacks and into the pockets and books of the most wealthy. That's exactly what happened with this government's policy.

We are far from the freest, fastest-moving economy. We are still struggling to move our resources to the U.S. market except for one pipeline that the then Premier, the Edmonton-Strathcona MLA, worked on in her government. That's the only pipeline that's in play. That's the only hope that our economy has of moving products to other markets, and this government has zero contribution in that project. The project they worked on was Keystone XL, which we supported when we were in government, too, but with the change of regime in the United States, we are seeing a lot more uncertainty about that, and Albertans are concerned about the \$7.5 billion that this government pledged in that project.

Again, we are not there yet. We are not the freest and fastest-moving economy, and, trust me, making changes to the Alberta Centennial Medal Act and how we will give out these medals, who will give out these medals – what was red tape within that act that was stopping us from efficiently distributing those medals will not get our economy on track to the fastest and freest-moving economy. I don't think that that act was in the way of our economy, that that act was creating any red tape in any way, shape, or manner that needed to be removed by this minister and this government for us to become the freest and fastest-moving economy. That's not my understanding of the economy, and I do have a background in economy as well.

Then, somehow, there are many other things that I can't see were in the way of us becoming the fastest and freest-moving economy.

There are many other things we could do to make our economy the freest and fastest-moving economy. If we choose to invest in health care and take this pandemic seriously, because that's the number one threat facing our economy today, and if we do not act – if we don't act – that will impact our economy, that will impact jobs, that will impact livelihoods, and that is already impacting. If we put some supports for small businesses, I think that might help us make our economy the freest and fastest, but we didn't see that happening.

If we invest in our schools, if we make them safer for all kids – 600-plus of our schools have COVID-19 cases – that might make our economy better. We cannot afford to shut down our schools. That impacts parents' abilities, families' abilities to be part of the economy. If we are really serious about making this economy better, we should be focusing on those kinds of things. We should be investing in affordable child care. That will make our economy the freest and fastest. When 50-plus per cent of our economy, of our population is able to participate in the economic life of our province, we will see economic yield. We will see our economy moving. If we will not invest in those areas, our economy will suffer no matter how much we change the Alberta Centennial Medal Act. That's not enough to move the economy forward.

Then there are things like – I'm kind of having a hard time with which bill I should pick and talk about because there are quite a few

of them, and I don't have enough time to talk about all of them. To make my position clear on this one, this particular one, the Alberta Centennial Medal Act, I think that we should recognize notable Albertans' services whenever they are doing something extraordinary. Even when they are doing something substantial for their communities, we should recognize their services. We should appreciate their services, but, again, that's a different kind of bill. The minister timed these changes – somehow these changes will make our economy better.

I think the number one question in my riding in northeast Calgary at this time is that we have among the highest infection cases communities, like, in the upper northeast. What people really want, what really will help their jobs, their livelihoods, their lives is a better co-ordinated response about the pandemic so they can be part of the economy. We haven't seen something on those lines from this government. Those cases are a huge cause for concern and are impacting people's ability to be part of the economy and be able to earn a livelihood as they used to before.

Also, as I said, in order to protect our economy, we need to have a stronger response to this pandemic. That response depends on how well our health care system is functioning. We know that we have really talented, hard-working, and skilled health care professionals who have been working day in and day out for the last six months. They are fighting this pandemic. They are fighting this virus on the front lines, but they didn't get support from this government. Their contracts were broken. Their jobs are threatened, and now there are 11,000 health care workers who will be out of jobs because of this government's policies.

8:00

These government MLAs not only refuse to stand up for those 11,000 workers, but they also go out and tell people that they're not even front-line workers. They're the ones who are cooking in our hospitals, they are the ones who are cleaning in our hospitals, and they don't even think that they are front-line health care workers.

If this government will choose to fire health care workers in the middle of the pandemic, that will impact our economy because firing front-line health care staff weakens our response to this pandemic. In order for our economy to keep working, we need stronger investments in the pandemic response; we need stronger investments in health care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is no 29(2)(a) available after the second speaker, but if anyone else is wishing to speak to the bill, perhaps there will be some 29(2)(a) later if the associate minister would like to engage in the debate.

For now, the hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women has the call.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opening of the discussion, and thank you to the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. As a small-business owner one of the biggest barriers that we have is regulatory compliance. That really, really is important to a small business to be able to move forward and to be able to work with the government on that.

I just want to maybe talk for a minute about – I don't know. When I speak about Alberta, I can't even control myself. I think about the ability to invest here, and honestly, if that's what we have selling Alberta and had selling Alberta before, that level of disinterest in the province, the way that you speak about the people that you represent, that they don't have the capacity or an ability to build this province back up even under the worst circumstances, if that is the best representation that we have, we have to question why people

were not investing here previously to now, not even with the comparable of not having COVID before, to even really compare apples to apples.

Even with that, I wish that, you know, at some point in time the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation will be here to talk about the jobs that have actually been created even amongst COVID. When it's his turn to speak, that will be wonderful to be able to hear that.

The Speaker: We wouldn't want to refer to the absence or the presence of any member. Of course, there are times when people might not be in the Chamber, but you wouldn't want to imply that someone wasn't if they were or they weren't.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't implying anything at all; just excited for that speech at a later time. Thank you for the correction.

I think about Canada internationally and how it's been recognized in the G-7 and G-8 countries as being the best place in the world to invest, Alberta being at the top of that list. I can't even contain myself. When I speak about our province, I think about the incredible humans we have here, the amazing ability to be resilient. What our associate minister has brought forward is an ability to take a look at the mechanism to see what we can do better. Actually, the former member who mentioned about the medallions piece, that is the Centennial Medal Act: you're right. It has nothing to do with the economy, a hundred per cent, but – guess what? – it saves taxpayer dollars because we created an efficiency and got rid of red tape in government. But that wouldn't have mattered to those folks because they didn't care what they spent.

We actually looked at our little ministry, that dollar for dollar we stretched those dollars, and we looked within to find efficiencies to save the taxpayer money. If that doesn't matter to them, that's why they're sitting over there. Honestly, that was an unbelievable – it's a small change, yes. Does it impact the economy? Probably not at the level of small business, but I'll tell you that when we looked inside at our ability to do our job and be a more efficient government, that was the job that I was given, and that's what I did.

Thank you to the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for having the capacity to look beyond just the window dressing of what the NDP calls red tape reduction and look internally. You know what? Government is actually about leading by example, so we're leading by example in our ministry. As teeny, tiny, as unimpressive as it might seem to the NDP, that was a big deal to us. A lot of them were.

Thank you to the minister for giving us the opportunity to look at ourselves internally, to be able to see what we can do better so that out there, when we're out with the people that we represent, we know that we're doing what we can here to do better. Especially under the situation we have right now, especially with the contraction in taxation, especially with less money coming into the government, it's never ever been more important than it is right now to find efficiencies so that the dollars that we do have can be leveraged in the best way possible to the people who put us here in the first place. That's just one example of the disrespect of the previous government, that had no respect for the taxpayer dollars. One example.

Oh, by the way, I'd like to also correct the record on what has been done, some of the accomplishments under this minister's belt. Just to name a few, last year – in fact, I was going to say that I think there have been, Minister, about 240 actions, as I understand, that have taken place up until this point. Did you know that the minister's work on this along with all the other ministries and all of the MLAs has saved Albertans a collective \$100 million per year

by fixing the payroll process? A hundred million dollars. Well, maybe that's not a big enough deal, but I'm telling you that as a small-business person, in terms of compliance and my ability to do my job, especially for a company that has under 20 people – they talk about the \$4.7 billion all the time. Well, for a small business, for me, that's dollars in my pocket and dollars that can be reinvested back into my business that does well in my community. A hundred million dollars: thank you, Minister.

We cut out extra oil sands approvals to allow the Alberta Energy Regulator to do their job, and we saved – I don't know – about \$26 million. Oh, right. That's not a big deal because that's taxpayer dollars, right? That's not a big deal to a government that did not care or honour the taxpayer dollars. Twenty-six million dollars, and that's just getting started. That's just on a small compliance piece within the Alberta Energy Regulator. That doesn't even include all of the other work that's being done on the TIER program and methane and all of the other work that's being done by the Minister of Energy and the minister of environment. That's just a small piece. I can't wait for this bill to go through so that we can do a further count and so that the minister can highlight on all of our behalves the incredible work that he has done along with the rest of his colleagues to show what that means for our province.

COVID isn't an excuse; it's a reality. Nobody in here gets to use COVID as an excuse. People are dying. It's absolutely ludicrous that you would use that as a reason. These people in this province: they are persevering and pushing through. If they went out into their communities, Mr. Speaker, and talked to the members in their communities, they would understand that this is a collaboration of trying to figure out: what's the right thing to do? There's no way to get it right all the time. I would fully admit that. But I will tell you this much. It is a work, a labour of love with the province, the people, Dr. Hinshaw, the Ministry of Health to figure out what it is that we need to do.

To assume that anybody in this province, including my colleagues in the opposition, would wish for the demise of any human being in this province is nothing short of disgusting, Mr. Speaker, and to use that division and fear to continue to break – we're so fragile right now in some aspects yet so resilient, and the opposition will continue to hammer on fear and division. Fear and division: it's all they've got and a few really, really well-articulated numbers that don't add up to anything. I'll give them this: they've got messaging down; that's for sure. Is it true? No.

8:10

An Hon. Member: Doesn't have to be, actually.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Don't let the facts get in the way.

Let's talk about the deficit. Let's talk about a structural deficit. This is what we were in when the NDP was in government, initially. A structural deficit, by definition – what you want is for people to go out and spend money. Ideally, you put enough money back into the taxpayer pockets that they go out and they contribute to the economy. They buy local, they go on trips, and they spend money in the economy, all of the things that bring forward a bustling economy.

Even now, even in COVID, you know what I see on my Facebook pages and all over? "Buy local. Hire local. Buy your produce from this person." Every single Facebook page is all about supporting your neighbour, whether that's a hairstylist or whether that is a massage therapist or whether that is somebody who is selling Christmas crafts or somebody who is shovelling snow. Albertans: do you know what they're saying on their Facebook pages of small-business people? "Support local." You know why? Because they understand how the economy works. They don't need government

to tell them how to do that. We just need to get out of their way so they can do that. That's what red tape reduction is all about.

You know, the NDP would have the world believe that Albertans are intolerant, incapable of compassion, and devoid of the ability to show the great love that we have for the people of this province. What's interesting about that is that every time they do something like that – you can attack us, that's fine, but you're also going after every single other Albertan that wants this province to succeed, Mr. Speaker. It's not just about us. There are 1.1 million people who put us here. You know what? The truth is that the NDP has used all sorts of language, and you want to sell Alberta? Well, you don't call the people that elected you sewer rats. You certainly don't call them the – yeah, cousins? What was that?

Some Hon. Members: The embarrassing cousins.

Mrs. Aheer: The embarrassing cousins. You don't go after the industry that creates all of the rest of those industries. That's what they do and somehow can get away with that and expect that somehow Albertans are going to say: "Oh, that's just fine. Yeah. Call us sewer rats. Call us embarrassing cousins. By all means." I'm sure it really resonated very well.

But the truth is that, at the end of the day, compassion and good communities and reaching out and volunteerism and all of the things that are built in this province were built on the backs of many, many different groups and organizations and companies and corporations that put everything they had into this province. All they need is the ability for us to come together and support them.

The previous member was talking about how he supported Keystone. Ha, ha, ha, it is to laugh. I almost giggled at that point because, truthfully, the amount of lobbying that came from that side to stop pipeline production – I had that portfolio for a little while. I remember thinking to myself: "How is it possible you're talking about the most environmental way to move products," not to mention the fact that they had the privilege of being in government, Mr. Speaker, and were working with some of the top people in the industry: MEG Energy, who had taken a ton of the diluent out of the pipeline to be able to increase pipeline access by 30 per cent – I know they know about this, because if I knew about it, I'm sure they knew about it – which gave us back our value-added, the ability to solidify dilbit and move it that way. But, instead, they were lobbying to have tanker bans and pipelines bans and using social licence as an excuse to shut down an industry that supports absolutely everything.

We talk about the arts in here all the time. Do you want to know who the largest funder is for the arts? Oil and gas. The Glenbow Museum, which has over a billion dollars of art in there, a lot of which none of us have ever seen, was put forward by an oil and gas family that has been here for three generations. The largest in North America. That is the love that that sector has for this province. Most of us have the privilege of being able to have the jobs that we had – I was a musician, and 90 per cent of my jobs came from oil and gas, manufacturing, agriculture, all of these wonderful sectors in this province. The belief is that we have a healthy economy and a healthy province and a reason to stay.

We have some of the most beautiful – beautiful – museums in this province, incredible heritage sites. Just gems, absolute gems. Yet, you know, I recall being in this Legislature and never once hearing, I don't think, a single word about culture, really, the entire time that they were in government or about the arts or about music or the culture or the things that bring us together. We have the economy which drives people here, brings them, but they stay because of all of those things. And that was built by these incredible sectors that red tape reduction will help to attract more of here.

Isn't that what we all want, at the end of the day, on both sides of this House? Don't you want the people in your constituencies to be healthy and happy and have jobs and success?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Then that is the common goal. It's not division, and it should never be fear. Good decisions are never made out of fear.

The other thing I wanted to say, too, is that tomorrow is Women's Entrepreneurship Day here in Alberta. Yay for the ladies; 84 out of 100 entrepreneurs in this province are women. Do you want to know what red tape reduction does for those businesses? It gives them the ability to be able to work with government. Government is actually the biggest problem of getting in the way of small business being successful. By having payroll pulled back and so many other things, our ability and compliance, that means those are dollars in our pocket so that we can go and get loans and leverage the dollars that we have in order to have successful businesses. Thank you, Minister, for giving a leg up, especially to the incredible entrepreneurial women in this province that are rock stars.

They are unbelievable. I met with a whole bunch of them over the last few weeks just to talk about their businesses and how they're doing. Women are extremely adaptive and pivoted just like that and were able to keep their businesses up and running and keep their families healthy and all of the people that they support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll see the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, since he was so excited before, and then we'll ensure that the opposition has an opportunity for 29(2)(a) following the next speaker.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always inspired by the hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. Not only does she actually come from business and understands how important small business is, but she has an absolute love for this province, and it shows in every day that she works. I was inspired by the words that she used when she talked about how the red tape reduction component in my bill, the heritage medal red tape reduction component, was something they really worked towards.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. members need to know that what we did was that we sent out to each of the ministries so that each ministry had the responsibility of being able to reduce regulatory burden within their own ministry by a third. In a ministry such as the hon. member's – you know what? – you've got to really dig to be able to find that. I take my hat off to the work that the minister did and that she actually was able to bring forward something that was really not needed; it was redundant. It's interesting because she found it whereas the NDP, when they were in government, could not find it. I remember when I was in that role in opposition, asking the then minister who was responsible for this: have you not found any of the laws or statutes or regulations, anything that could be cut, anything that could be pulled out and get out of the way of our job creators and innovators and our everyday Albertans? He said: no, we haven't.

Yet we have shown time and time again – in fact, this last report that I just tabled the other day shows how much we did. We were able to find over 52,000 of these redundant or outdated or pinch points that just don't make sense anymore. We were able to find those in one year. In one year. In that same year we were able to set up an associate ministry of red tape – never been done in this province before – we were able to create a culture within government to be able to actually have a lens for looking at red tape reduction, and we were able to actually reduce \$476 million of burden on our job creators.

Mr. Speaker, that is a great story to tell. We're not ashamed of that at all. In fact, we want to tell it from the housetops. We want to make sure that people know that we are serious about getting out of the way of our job creators, making sure that they have every tool they need in order to be able to provide good, strong jobs to everyday Albertans. This is our goal. This is why we were elected.

8:20

We are hyperfocused, and we will make sure that we get Albertans back to work. We know where that work comes from. That work comes from our job creators. It doesn't come from government. It comes from job creators and businesses. And what we've heard far too often from the NDP, the Official Opposition, is an attack on our job creators. This is something that – they were rejected back in April 2019 because of that rejection. They didn't understand the symbiotic relationship between job creators and employees. They didn't understand that you have to have strong job creators if you're going to have strong employment.

Mr. Speaker, I take my hat off to the hon. member for this Herculean work that she has done and that every minister has done. This is actually a government-wide initiative. For that, I would have to say that each of the ministers needs to be able to take a bow, that each of them needs to be able to say that we worked hard to be able to get to this point.

But, Mr. Speaker, we're not done yet. We've reduced 6 per cent of the full reduction that we're going to be going after. Not only are we reducing the actual count, which is what the minister was able to do in getting rid of that redundant piece of legislation or pieces of it, but we're really focused on making sure that we get rid of the compliance cost as well. That compliance cost is far more important to our job creators. As I said in my remarks when I opened second reading, that is about being able to make sure that we get out of the way, make sure that there's proper time for our people to be able to get people back to work and do what they do best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for – well, there were two seconds, so perhaps I was a little premature in my concluding of the 29(2)(a).

Is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader has the call.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the associate minister took up 29(2)(a), I actually do have some questions related to the bill. I actually wanted to ask the minister for clarity around the sections that she was referencing, so I'm going to take some time to do that now. I recognize that we like to speak at a high level and not actually get into some of the details of this really, really thick piece of legislation, but there are some sections that – it's more clarity. I'm not saying that they're necessarily bad, I'm not saying that they're necessarily good, but I would prefer if we could have some clarity around it.

Because the minister did stand up and speak to the Historical Resources Act, I did want to just put some questions out there that maybe we can get some answers to as we move through our different stages of debate on this bill. Part of that is section 19, which was specifically repealed under this piece of legislation. It's found on page 17 of the new bill. It speaks to a variety of different things when it comes to historical sites. Some of the questions that have arisen out of this are – one of the things was the definition of the registered historical resources and how those definitions are being determined and what the documentation requirements are in relation to that.

Of course, this brings up some questions just for, I think, Albertans as a whole when we look at some of our historical sites and whether or not this means that this now empowers the minister with the ability to deregister historical sites, whether or not that protects archaeological sites and future sites that may be found that relate to future paleontology and archaeology that is found in the province and whether or not that then empowers the minister to be able to determine whether or not they would be deemed historical sites. Of course, I would think, specifically around Drumheller, when we're seeing that there may be some more fossils found in different areas or even within the riverbeds, in the hoodoos, whether or not some of that could change how in the future these are deemed designated.

Also, there's a definition under section 19 that speaks to the public interest. The question, of course, around that is that the minister considers to be in the public – sorry. Let me rephrase that. The part that is being repealed says, "May by order designate any historic resource the preservation of which the Minister considers to be in the public interest," but now that is repealed out of the legislation. So the question then becomes: who is determining the public interest? If it's no longer the minister, where will that land, and who will have the authority to determine the preservation requirements and the public interest? Of course, there are copies of the order that are provided to the owner of a historical resource, and that is also now being repealed. So the question then becomes: if we have historical sites that are owned by municipalities or owned within different regions, are we no longer notifying those jurisdictions that they may potentially have a historical designation happening within their communities?

Let me just look and see. Some of it has to relate to land, registration of certificates. I get that part. The repealing of the act around removal of a historical object from a historical resource that has been designated under this section: there's a 90-day requirement for notification of that that's now been repealed. I guess the question then becomes: is there now no longer a minimal requirement for notification if any artifacts are being removed from certain locations and sites? Are you extending it, or are you setting, within regulation, different days? As of right now, because it's removed from the legislation, there is no expiration date of the 90 days that I was able to find. I'm not saying that – I mean, it might be in a different section of the act. Those are some of the questions that are coming up specifically around the historical sites.

Now, moving through the bill – because we actually read them in the opposition. To be clear, Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to the Minister of Children's Services, so none of what I'm putting on the record here is new to her. She's very aware of what I've brought forward. On page 6 there's the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act amendment. Now, I've looked through most of the changes that are coming through within this legislation. I recognize that the associate minister did reference that this is specifically related to many of the adoption processes. You know, I support, actually, quite a few of the things that have been changed, so I'm not trying to minimize that at all.

What I have said to the minister as well is that, of course, this is something that is passionate to my heart. This is where I grew up in, I guess, professionally, when working in Children's Services. At any time when I see the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act being adjusted, it always brings a little bit of apprehension for myself just because it tends to impact many different sections within that piece of legislation because it is a significant piece of legislation. Now, in looking at the changes that have been made, again, to be honest, most of them make sense. I've mentioned to the minister that I'm actually pleased to see that the matters to be considered have actually been expanded. That means that when

we're looking at matters to be considered for adoption and looking at Children's Services, they've expanded the different areas that should be looked at instead of having just the simple eight narrow views. I actually think that that's very important, especially when it comes to adoption.

Of course, we know that children that are in care are in Children's Services, and if we're looking at private adoption as well, it is always beneficial for children to be able to access placements, to have permanency in their lives but still have that connection to their families. So when we see that there have been matters to be considered that have been expanded specifically within looking at children's extended families or with a person who has a significant relationship with the child, they were not considered under the matters to be considered before, and now they are.

I think that that definitely speaks to the change in culture that is happening within Children's Services and making sure that there is a more concrete approach in relation to making sure that at any time a child is adopted, all family has been explored previously and that, of course, now, as we move toward more open adoptions, family or children and descendants of those family members will be able to access their extended family, learn about their history, and learn about their medical history and all those things.

8:30

The one piece, however, that I did want to highlight is under section 66(2) on page 8. Section 66(2) is amended by striking out "serve on" and substituting "provide to." Right now the act says, "The Minister shall [provide] on the applicant forthwith a copy of any report filed by the Minister under [this] subsection." Now, the word "serve" is very important when it comes to Children's Services. It is very important when it comes to working with biological families and adoptive families. The reason for that is that there is always that court process that all families have to go through. When we look at the word "serve," there is a legal requirement to provide that service to whoever is being referenced within the act. Of course, in this scenario it is the application process. It would be referred to the investigation, home assessment, whatever that is being provided to the adoptive family.

Now that we're saying "provide to," what could potentially happen is that whatever worker that is working within the adoption world could potentially have a liability in relation to ensuring that they have met the court requirements for service. Because we've removed "service," the worker is still going to somehow be required to demonstrate to the courts, through this legal binding process, that that information has been provided.

Of course, the minister and I have talked about this, and I believe, like, she's clarified it, but I did want to flag because, of course, as a worker, when I worked for Children's Services, if I didn't provide efficient service, if I didn't fill out my court documents appropriately that demonstrated the service was provided, it could sometimes slow down the court process and actually make it harder to do, whether it be adoption, whether it be looking at temporary guardianship or whatever. If I couldn't demonstrate to the courts that I had followed the correct process, they would then adjourn it and send me back and make me do the work.

I believe the minister is looking into it, and I understand that there is potentially some rationale that exists within this, but that is the one piece that I think – although I appreciate that some of this actually is addressing just cleaning up the legislation so that biological families don't have to go through such an extensive process to finalize adoptions, we just want to make sure that there is no court liability that exists with changing that one word. My impression is that I think it's okay as long as there's still, in the regulation, some form of requirement that the court requires. If the regulation meets the need,

then you're probably fine, but if it doesn't, then you might have to re-evaluate that one definition change.

Again, the rest of it – like I said, I support changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act when it comes to permanency. I think it's extremely important. I recognize as well that we are in a transition with Children's Services when it comes to indigenous children and, of course, the federal legislation that now has created some complexity around creating permanency for kids. I just want to ensure that, of course, any changes that are happening under this section are not accidentally imposing any type of complexity within the other pieces of the legislation, because, like I said, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act is probably just as thick as this piece of legislation is, and the associate minister is touching on quite a variety of different pieces of legislation in here. As we know, sometimes when you change one regulation, it impacts another regulation, that all of a sudden creates complexities within the pieces of legislation.

Again, it's not a criticism; it's just a clarifying question, more because I would hate to see something where, by removing the word "service" and saying "provided to," all of a sudden we're actually slowing down the adoption process just because we're not meeting the court requirement, which I'm sure the ministry has already managed and probably already has the answer to that.

Those are the two sections that I wanted to focus on. Again, I want to recognize and appreciate what the minister of culture and tourism and status of women and a whole bunch of other things – it's very long; the minister has a lot of portfolios – was saying in regard to, you know, the opposition trying to come in and turn this into an us against them. I hope that as we move through these pieces of legislation this evening and as we move through the next few weeks before we head into Christmas, we can start focusing on maybe solutions. I believe that there are pieces of these legislations that are raising some questions, and they may be very clear, that are easy to answer, and if the associate minister has the answers or the ministers have the answers as we move into Committee of the Whole, that would be appreciated. Again, like I said, the Child and Youth Advocate file is just more in my heart than it is necessarily that – like, I'm not trying to create issues out of it.

I also want to speak to the fact that, yes, COVID is being brought up, and it is very valid that COVID is being brought up, I think, in all of our discussions that we're having over the next few weeks and as we go into these different pieces of bills. I think the issue that we have here is that all members in this House and, I think, Albertans are all managing with COVID in different ways. All of us have stress and anxiety that are attached to that, and I think that at some point when we ask the questions that we've been asking the government about how we manage COVID, it is because we are trying to bring forward those stressors and those anxieties on behalf of Albertans.

It is uncertain times right now, for sure, for everybody. I appreciate that that can create, you know, tension in this space, but my hope over the next few weeks is that we can move through these pieces of legislation, specifically this thick one that speaks and touches on a variety of different pieces of legislation – to be honest, I read the front, so I hit the first two pieces of legislation that I could speak to – but that we acknowledge that we are in an economic crisis. We do have COVID. Many of these pieces of legislation are touching on health care and they're touching on the economy and they're touching on very different things, and there are legitimate questions being raised around many of these pieces of legislation.

I would like us to get into a conversation where we can be solution focused and try to get some good amendments and things put forward in the House, and I will sit down.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, and thank you to the hon. member for her excellent questions. I don't know if I'll remember everything that you asked me, but I have a fairly good overview, I think, that will help.

Just so you know, there were three parts to the Historical Resources Act. There's the municipal, the provincial resource heritage, the designations, and then this piece. This was the redundant piece that actually hasn't been invoked since 2004, and no dollars have actually been put to it since then. The 276 properties that were actually impacted by this: they were all consulted over approximately the last 10 years off and on. Final consultations came in, and it was overwhelming that this is an issue of property ownership. Because most of these designations had been made in the past, we actually as a government have no say over the well-being of that property even after dollars have been designated to it.

Say, for example, that a roof on a really cool barn was fixed. If the next property owner purchases that, they can just knock it down, and the 90 days did nothing other than cause red tape. Actually, we have no say as a government over those designations at all. It was just a matter of getting rid of that one piece. The pieces that are provincial and municipal still can work together and can still fund raise for those and apply for dollars for those designations. There are some real gems, so for the ones that are especially important, we make sure and work with those organizations.

You were asking about places like the hoodoos and things like that. That actually falls under a different designation. That goes through the Tyrell museum and other organizations that work with geology and all of that. All of those actually have to be brought to the experts that are there and then go through an entire process before they're actually designated. In fact, actually, oil and gas has a lot to do with that because they actually find a lot of those remains and ruins and – I guess not ruins necessarily, but they find a lot of remains and bones and other things, so there's an entire process that they have to go through in order to get that stuff designated.

8:40

This particular piece was really interesting, because I actually had the same questions as you when this was brought forward to me, and actually my colleagues asked me some similar questions, too, just because we were concerned that the government would have too much overreach into a designation or lack of designation on a place. But what we heard overwhelmingly is that the legislation actually got in the way of landowners being able to do what they wanted to with their properties because this designation doesn't protect the property in any way, shape, or form.

What I can do: I'm happy further, Member, to just send you over more of the specifics because this is really great information for your constituents if they have questions about this. My door is always open, so if you have any particular questions around any specific thing, it would be my absolute pleasure to answer them.

Thank you for the questions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are two minutes and 12 seconds left in 29(2)(a) if anyone has a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today in the House in support of Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). You know, our government was

elected with a mandate to reduce red tape, and we've kept that promise to Albertans. It's critical that we make it easier for businesses to operate, create jobs, and drive our economy forward and make life easier for Albertans.

An important part of this bill that is overlooked and that I'd like to talk about today deals with family adoption and parts of the processes that help children across our province find their forever home. When we first formed government last year, I had the privilege of introducing one of the very first motions that the Legislature passed, Motion 501, and although this might seem daunting to a new MLA, for me, it was very easy to decide what I wanted to bring forward to this House as a private member.

Now, most of you already know the story that I told about excessive red tape and the desire of my family to simply add to our family and to give a child a forever home. For a brief recap, after my son Aiden was born and after numerous health challenges, my wife and I decided that we wanted to adopt a young child. We were faced with several years of delay and challenges in a similar fashion to what many Albertans and families right across our province are facing.

As painful as this experience was, my history with adoption actually inspired my motion last year, which stated, "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take all necessary measures to make the process for all forms of adoption more efficient and timely for families." I know first-hand the amount of anxiety and stress that the adoption process can cause families, and after what I personally went through, I wanted to do everything I could to prevent other families from experiencing what my wife and I did. I would like to thank all members in this House that supported my motion last year. That is why I found it so important to speak to this important bill today.

After reading through the proposed amendments in this legislation, I know that, if passed, Bill 48 will make the lives of children and families much easier. I also know that many of the proposed amendments were informed through the Red Tape Reduction Act submissions provided by Albertans, and I am thankful for those submissions. As a proud father who went through that exact adoption process, I'd like to say thank you to all the Albertans that took the time to give their submissions.

I am confident that these amendments, many of which were suggested by Albertans themselves, will improve the lives of individuals who have been adopted and their families by helping them to access a greater level of information about their past. Proposed amendments in Bill 48 will amend general disclosure provisions in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to increase ministry flexibility and provide documentation to Albertans and improve overall service levels. As the legislation currently reads, there are limits on the type and level of information that can be shared and with whom it can be shared. This, of course, causes a great deal of angst and anxiety amongst families right across our province. However, amendments in Bill 48 will address this issue, and for that I'm extremely grateful. If passed, proposed amendments would now allow for an active search capacity to disclose critical health information to adoptees and birth families.

As of right now family members who have been adopted may be facing barriers in attempts to retrieve medical information about their biological family. Adoptees could have several hereditary medical conditions in their biological family genealogy. Not only would they have no idea about these medical conditions; they would have no idea what or how they could be preparing for these health issues for their future. This is yet another struggle that Albertans have been faced with that an easy solution could solve. The wording in the current legislation is currently preventing this access in some circumstances, which affects families across Alberta

and in my riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. However, if passed, Bill 48 would allow for greater transparency of family history and medical information, and amendments would enable ministry staff to search out and contact involved parties to provide health information. This is a simple and needed change that will vastly improve the lives of adoptees and their families here in Alberta.

In keeping with the commitment to enhance the disclosure of information and identity to adoptees and their families, Bill 48 makes changes that will allow minors who are aged 16 to 18 years old and living independently to make an application for voluntary contact. Amendments in Bill 48 would enable Alberta's government to better assist these young people who no longer have a relationship with their adopted parents. Simply put, we are making it easier for youth to access information about their biological family. I can't stress, Mr. Speaker, how important this is for many individuals right across our province. That is what these amendments are about, making it easier for children and families to connect with one another and approve lifelong connections.

As you can see, if passed, Bill 48 will allow a freer flow of information from Children's Services and increase the amount of information that can be disclosed and to whom it can be disclosed. Mr. Speaker, this alone will make a world of difference for many adoptees right across this province. Proposed amendments will also align with other aspects in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, allowing for all of our legislation to get back on the same page.

I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Children's Services and MLA for Calgary-Shaw, who did such incredible work with me over this last year on this motion, and again thank you to the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction for bringing this bill here today. The Minister of Children's Services had an open-door policy with adoption agencies in order to have the input that helped make this legislation possible.

I hope that each member of this House will carefully consider how meaningful and impactful these changes will be to adoptees and their families. These amendments and this bill as put forth by the associate minister, which will reduce red tape and make adoption easier for children and families, may seem simple to us, but to these families, Mr. Speaker, families that simply want a family, just like mine, this will be life changing.

Thank you.

I'd like to adjourn debate as well.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 41

Insurance (Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care) Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Sabir moved on behalf of Mr. Dach that the motion for second reading of Bill 41, Insurance (Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 41, Insurance (Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment November 17: Mr. Dang speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and offer a few comments on the referral amendment related to Bill 41, that we are discussing today. I think it's incredibly important to refer this bill to committee, as the referral amendment does, to consider the impacts that these proposed changes to the automobile insurance system here in Alberta will have on the victims of automobile accidents.

I want to spend my time tonight discussing in detail the concerns that I have heard from many constituents and many people who've been involved with vehicle accidents over the years from all over Alberta with respect to the changes that the government is proposing under the minor injury regulations that are associated with this bill. As we all know and as has been pointed out time and again, this piece of legislation is proposing to expand the types and numbers of injuries that are covered by the minor injury regulation so that people who suffer those injuries are only eligible to be awarded a total financial reward of \$5,296 as of today.

8:50

I think it's particularly concerning when we consider that one of the injuries that the government is considering moving into this minor injury regulation is concussion. You know, I have a number of concerns about the government's consideration of this potential move that I think would be properly reviewed by the committee of this Legislature, and I think that it's important that the members of this Legislature take the time needed to dig into this issue of concussions and whether or not they should be considered minor injuries under this proposed legislation, because, in my view, Mr. Speaker, concussions are anything but minor injuries.

I think it's helpful to remind the House of what a concussion is. A concussion is an injury to the brain that occurs when the head suddenly moves and the brain knocks against the skull suddenly, and that causes the neurons that comprise the brain to stretch and break. When those neurons stretch and break, that means that they aren't able to communicate with one another and that the normal functioning of the brain is therefore impaired. Of course, the degree to which it's impaired depends largely on the severity of the concussion that has been suffered by the injured person. Now, when your neurons are stretched and broken, as I said, your brain can no longer function properly, and that causes a wide variety of symptoms, which include anything from headaches, dizziness, memory loss, mood changes, PTSD, Mr. Speaker.

You know, maybe when we talk about it in the abstract here, these things don't sound like big deals, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that anybody who has suffered from migraine headaches knows exactly how debilitating those can be. In fact, before coming to participate in the session this evening, I left my partner, who was in the midst of suffering from a migraine headache this evening, and that will prevent her from functioning normally for a number of hours and possibly days. This is something that happens frequently, and there is no cure or even adequate treatment for it in those cases. Unfortunately, she's always had migraines for as long as she can remember, but fortunately this was not something that was a result of a vehicle injury.

These kinds of symptoms have been profiled to a great extent because athletes in both the NHL and the NFL have begun to talk a lot about the impacts that concussions have had on their lives. Of course, we all know that Eric Lindros cut his fantastic career in the NHL short because of multiple concussions, and a number of other NHL players launched a lawsuit even against the NHL because, in their view, they believe that the NHL didn't take adequate precautions to prevent them from suffering these concussions, that have such dramatic effects on their lives.

Now, the NHL settled with those players. It was a settlement of about \$19 million, which is considerably more per person who was involved with that lawsuit than the \$5,296 that the members opposite are saying is due to victims who suffer concussions as a result of vehicle injury. I think it would be interesting for the committee, if this amendment is passed and this bill is referred to committee, to look into perhaps the government's reasoning as to why they think that an injury award of \$5,296 is suitable for a vehicle accident victim but that the courts have decided that NHL players who have suffered from the same injury, a different cause but the same injury, are due much, much more in their awards. I think the committee would be very interested in digging into the reasons why there is such a discrepancy between what the courts are willing to award the victims of these injuries and what the members of Executive Council seem to think these people are due.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share a story of a close friend of mine who suffered a concussion while he was on his way to work. Now, he was riding his bicycle but was on the wrong end of an interaction with a motor vehicle and was thrown off his bicycle as a result and suffered a concussion. I can tell you that that injury happened to him almost a decade ago, and he is still suffering symptoms that impair his ability to work, impair his ability to function as a normal human being, as he was able to do before being a victim in that accident.

I don't think that it would be fair to him to expect him to be able to pick up the pieces of his life and be able to live in the lifestyle to which he was accustomed prior to the accident on a minor injury award of only \$5,296. Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many job opportunities he's missed, how many hours of work he's missed because he was laid up in bed at home suffering from crippling migraine headaches, suffering from crippling dizziness, terrifying memory loss. I would like the members opposite to tell people like my friend why it is that he's only entitled to an award of \$5,296. That would come nowhere close to compensating him for the hours of work that he's missed, for the job opportunities that he's lost, for the pain and suffering that he had to endure, the time that he had to take to receive medical treatment, go to psychotherapy to deal with the mood changes that he suffered, not to mention the terrible toll that it has taken on his personal life.

Mr. Speaker, when you suffer a concussion, you can suffer from incredible mood changes that are incredibly damaging to personal relationships that a person has established, and sometimes those relationships are permanently destroyed. In many other cases they suffer serious harm. I wouldn't attempt – I don't know how to put a price on those things, but those things can also be turned into a financial cost, and I would bet that that financial cost is far greater than \$5,296, that members of Executive Council are saying is due to victims like my friend.

I think it would be interesting for the committee to invite people who have suffered from concussions to come and testify in front of the members of the House so that we can all understand what it's like to be a victim of a concussion as a result of a vehicle injury so that we can hear from them the stories about the challenges that they've faced navigating a health care system that isn't set up to deal with these kinds of injuries in an adequate way. Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you how frustrated my friend has been even trying to get his diagnosis taken seriously. There are a whole host of doctors out there who are still rather old school in their thinking and don't think that concussions are a big deal. You just sleep it off and pick yourself up and go back to work the next day. That's incredibly discouraging. People who are navigating a health care system that is hostile at times to these diagnoses of concussion need appropriate financial support, and that financial support, I would imagine, is far

greater than the \$5,296 that the members opposite seem to think is the maximum that should be awarded to these victims.

9:00

I'm certainly interested to hear from accident victims what their experiences are with the health care system, how difficult it has been for them to navigate Alberta's health care system to get the appropriate diagnosis and treatment so that they can recover properly from their concussions. Mr. Speaker, it's an incredibly challenging endeavour, and I think that if given the opportunity, the committee would be able to not only gain a better appreciation of the kinds of struggles that these victims have to deal with as a result of their injuries, but certainly that would allow us to come to a better conclusion as to whether or not concussions should even be considered as minor injuries.

I think we could even expand the scope of work of that committee and maybe look at making recommendations as to the kinds of supports that these victims need to navigate the health care system. What kinds of changes do we need to look at in Alberta's health care system so that people who suffer from concussions have the appropriate support, that there is the knowledge and the appreciate of concussion as a legitimate injury and that the treatments are readily available to people who've suffered these kinds of injuries?

I don't think that the Legislature is the appropriate place for this discussion to be happening, Mr. Speaker. We know that the government only consulted the car insurance industry in coming up with these regulations. We know that they continued to shut out accident victims, didn't want to listen to them. We have a bill here that looks like it's the result of intense corporate lobbying on behalf of the insurance industry. Of course, here in the Legislature we don't have the ability in this Chamber to call forth witnesses from the other side, the victims and the people who represent them.

Mr. Speaker, in that spirit of fairness I urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

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

Ms Phillips: Indeed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the hon. member was beginning to talk about the effects on people in terms of the skyrocketing rates and the fact that people who had not been involved in any kind of collision or other, you know, incident in which they were at fault are finding themselves having to deal with very large spikes in their auto insurance rates. When they receive their renewals, they also receive quite a shock with respect to what their household budget is going to now look like for being able to drive down the road.

I am wondering if the hon. member might want to – he shared some views of people who had suffered concussions and those sorts of things that are now being moved into a schedule of minor injuries. I'm wondering if the hon. member could talk a little bit about what he's heard from his constituents with respect to the effect on the pocketbook, particularly during the pandemic, of skyrocketing insurance rates given that insurance industry profitability and availability of auto insurance is, in fact, the rationale for this bill coming forward to us and the sorts of voices that we might hear from if we were to have that kind of a committee-based conversation on this piece of legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my friend from Lethbridge-West for her questions because I believe that she does raise an important issue with respect to the rise in cost of automobile insurance and the fact that this piece of legislation was apparently brought forward, ostensibly, according to the minister, to bring insurance rates under control when, in fact, nothing of the sort is in the offing here. This is a piece of legislation that will only make an insanely profitable industry even more insanely profitable.

You know, it's interesting. The member was asking me about what I've heard from my constituents about increasing auto insurance rates. In fact, just today at lunchtime I was talking to a friend of mine who said that his auto insurance rates had jumped 17 per cent from last year. Mr. Speaker, what was notable about that is that that's one of the lowest increases that I've heard of from people who have talked to me about their concerns around rising insurance rates.

The frustrating thing, Mr. Speaker, is that none of the people who have raised the issue of skyrocketing insurance rates own insurance companies or are even shareholders in insurance companies. These are people who are working average salaried jobs. I don't need to remind members, of course, that the average yearly salary of an Albertan is about \$40,000 a year, so to see their insurance rates jump hundreds of dollars a year is taking away from pretty scarce resources as it is. It makes their lives hard, financially more difficult, but it's more than that.

They also know that that money, that hard-earned money, is going to pad the pocketbooks of insurance company CEOs and shareholders, who are already insanely wealthy. Not only does it make it harder for them to drive their automobiles, which is an absolute necessity in our car-centric province, Mr. Speaker, but it's also insanely unfair that these people, who are working sometimes two and three jobs, are asked to pay hundreds of dollars more a year just to be able to continue to work while some insurance company fat cat buys more ivory back-scratchers with that money. This is incredibly offensive to them, and I have to say that I share their disappointment with this state of affairs. That's why I think we should look at this in committee.

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

Is there anyone wishing to speak? I see the hon. the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you for that rousing introduction, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. The amendment REF1 was moved on your behalf by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, which prevents you from being able to speak to the amendment a second time, of sorts. It was moved on your behalf, so you're unable to speak again.

It appears, though, that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West would like to speak.

Ms Phillips: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that clarification, and thank you for the opportunity to rise to speak to this amendment to Bill 41 and for me to speak a little bit about why it is in the public interest for the public to in fact be able to engage on this very important piece of legislation. There is a lot here in this bill. Because Bill 41 and the regulations that were introduced work in tandem, it is important to understand how both of these items work to support insurance companies to the exclusion of support for ordinary people. Moreover, the report outlines the government's future direction. It is in alignment with the initial steps taken through Bill 41 and the regulatory changes.

9:10

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have heard from, at this point, many, many constituents and folks throughout Lethbridge and throughout southern Alberta about the increases to their car insurance, beginning about a year ago, when people began to receive their renewal notices after the cap on the amount that their car insurance could be increased. It had been capped at a very reasonable 5 per cent. Folks started contacting my office and saying, you know: "What do we have here? Why has my insurance gone up by 15 per cent, 20 per cent, 25 per cent when I have not had an accident in which I was at fault? I have not had a speeding ticket or photo radar." But here we are with this big bill.

This continued on, Mr. Speaker, even when people were parking their cars for days and weeks at a time through the early phase one of the pandemic in March and April, when the government brought in a lockdown. People saw their car insurance increase even though their miles on the road were significantly decreased to expensive paperweights residing in the driveway.

All along we heard that the insurance companies were having a terrible time, Mr. Speaker, and life was very difficult for them. But according to the report that was just released by the province, the industry has pocketed an additional \$820 million in premiums from Albertans this past year, on top of, of course, the massive handout that went to a lot of these fancy Toronto-based companies in the form of a massive corporate tax cut.

On average Albertans are paying 24 per cent more this year for insurance, so no wonder the calls are coming in to the constituency office. No wonder the e-mails are happening. No wonder the, you know, Facebook messages are being sent in saying: how did this happen?

A voice mail came in earlier this year. I recall it very clearly. It was an elderly woman phoning up. She was in her 80s. She could not understand why – she was asking us why – her car insurance for a vehicle she rarely drives had gone up more than 20 per cent. She explained on this lengthy voice mail the state of her finances, the fact that she was a widow into her 80s but still, you know, very spry, walked most places but used her vehicle periodically. She concluded her voice mail with: how does the government think that anybody voted for this? It was a good question, because nobody did, as it turns out, Mr. Speaker. There was absolutely no transparency with people. I do not recall in the lengthy and oft-revised UCP platform document any commitment to a 24 per cent increase average in people's premiums, funnelling an additional \$820 million in premiums into the insurance industry. I don't recall that, and my octogenarian constituent was, in fact, quite right. She was quite accurate. Such a thing was never campaigned upon because Albertans would not have it. That's why we need to have the conversation with our constituents now in the interest of actually hearing from folks.

Now, there are a number of ways in which this bill also alters the balance for people who are injured as a result of collision and the balance that exists through the tort system as opposed to a no-fault system. All of those alterations of the balance benefit insurance companies to the detriment of drivers and, therefore, to the detriment of the families and their dependants as well. Insurers will benefit from lowering the prejudgment insurance rate, but Albertans who have been in a collision will get less. There are changes to the direct compensation property damage that open the door to a no-fault system. We'll talk about that in a minute. You know, the fact is that plans to bring in a full no-fault system that includes health elements will take away the ability for injured Albertans to sue. There is a further gift in terms of giving the auto industry full control of the insurance rate board through government

appointments, giving even more favourable premium rates to insurance companies through that mechanism.

The industry has been wanting an expansion of minor injury for some time. Now, as we've heard from my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, we know that the province wants to consider a concussion to be minor so insurance companies can pay out fewer dollars in claims.

I am reminded, Mr. Speaker, on this file, of a conversation I had quite recently. It would have been over constituency week because we had a massive snowfall, like, two or three days of snowfall, classic southern Alberta, where it's about minus two degrees and the snow is heavy and wet. Of course, I have two little boys that are nine and 11, that can shovel the sidewalk just fine, but out there I was shovelling away, and one of my neighbours happened by. He's an attorney at one of the downtown law firms in general litigation of various kinds. He was walking a wrangy 14-month-old through a snowstorm because at 14 months the patience for wanting to stay inside has not yet been developed, that sort of executive function that, you know, perhaps it's a nice day to wander around indoors.

So the 14-month-old was toddling along and so was my neighbour who is an attorney, and he stopped to chat while I was clearing my walks. It ended up that the snow was coming down so long and we talked so long that I actually had to double back and do the walk again because he was so concerned about the effects for some of the more seriously injured clients that he has acted for over the course of his career. Now, he's not specifically an injury lawyer; however, in smaller places we know that folks take on different kinds of files and act for all kinds of different people, and he is such a lawyer. One of the things that he was talking about was the no-fault system and exactly how it would punish folks who had been severely injured, and he was talking about that ongoing support for people who are the victims of very serious disabilities now being absolutely left behind by the changes that this minister has signed off on.

9:20

There are other ways, not just some of the movements toward no-fault, that are problematic for people. For example, the interest on a prospective claims final payout begins on the day of the accident, but now it's been lowered from 4 per cent to 1.5, and the interest begins accruing when the statement of claim or notice of statement of claim is filed. For example, if there is a very serious permanent spinal damage and a settlement is reached for several hundred thousand dollars, previous to that the final award would have been accrued in prejudgment interest before the claim was filed at 4 per cent and 4 per cent interest during the settlement phase. So the final payout, if the settlement was \$200,000, would be \$216,000, but under the new legislation there's no interest accrued before the statement of claim is filed and only \$3,000 of interest during the settlement phase because it's 1.5 per cent, so the final payment goes down to \$203,000.

Meanwhile, that person has been adjusting to a life of a permanent spinal injury and waiting for that claim and undertaking all of those expenses of a massive life change, and that person will be now ripped off to the tune of \$13,000 because insurance lobbyists went in and they just enumerated what they wanted and there were some stenographers in the minister's office who gave it to them under Bill 41. That's why this needs to go to a committee for consideration. We need to hear from people. If we're going to have people suffering from lifetime injuries, this business of nickel and diming them out of thousands of dollars while they wait for their claim to be paid out should be — the government should want to take the opportunity to actually explain why that's a good idea to

real people, to people who are significantly and adversely affected by these life-changing events.

There are other ways in which expert reports are limited: one expert report if under \$100,000 and three expert reports over \$100,000 in terms of the value of the claim. Once a final settlement is reached, of course, insurers pay for medical reports and court costs, so that limits their final payout amounts. It limits the ability of victims to introduce all evidence they feel is necessary to make their claim. This limitation on the introduction of evidence into a proceeding appears to be a quite significant abrogation of an individual's right to seek a claim and to litigate what has happened to them and who is at fault and who should ultimately pay for it.

A number of these changes were, you know, of significant concern to my neighbour on that snowy day and certainly nowhere near exclusively because he's a lawyer. He was worried about the kinds of files and the kinds of folks that he has worked for in these really, really serious, life-altering collisions.

Driving is probably statistically one of the more dangerous things we do. You know, people are afraid of flying. I'm not. My father had a private pilot's licence. Maybe I should have been more afraid of flying on those grounds, but I wasn't. I grew up in smaller aircrafts. But the thing to be afraid of in the run of a day is getting in your vehicle, Mr. Speaker, statistically speaking, anyway. If we're going to take a strictly evidence-based look at this, particularly if we're younger, that is almost the highest risk activity we can do.

If people are injured, they need to get what they need to be able to get on with their lives and their work, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to get up to respond to perhaps some of the assertions that have been made around this bill. Firstly, I do want to talk about the rate cap that the members opposite put into place when they were governing. They keep speaking about a rate cap being the only solution, the absolute only solution to deal with high insurance premiums. We do have high insurance premiums in this province. We certainly acknowledge that. In fact, that is why we are bringing this bill forward, Bill 41.

Bill 41 will deal with many of the underlying fundamental problems, issues that are driving up claims costs that result in higher premiums. Mr. Speaker, again, as I listen to the members opposite, their only solution is a rate cap. There's nothing that we could do to deal with the fundamental drivers that are pushing up costs, in their view, that would ultimately translate into lower premiums because their view is this: the insurance companies regardless will take any savings that are achieved through structural reforms, and they will not pass those to consumers. That is a flawed view of a competitive free-market system. It is a flawed view, and it leads to one thing. In fact, it leads to the outcome that was beginning to take place as their rate cap was in effect. That is, as a business's costs rise above what you can charge a customer, to offset those costs, businesses start to pull out. They start to pull back, and you actually start to reduce and eventually eliminate business participation.

For consumers what does that mean? That means that consumers eventually have no options. They have no choices. Ultimately, taken to its extreme, Mr. Speaker, it would result in the collapse of the insurance industry, of the automobile insurance industry here in the province. The members opposite often point out the fact that insurance companies, based on publicly available data, have been making money, and they're right. Broadly, on all of their lines of business they've been profitable, but independent sources that have access to insurance company data have concluded that on the

automobile insurance segment of that book of business in Alberta, insurance companies have been losing money. When you take a look at their behaviour, their behaviour is consistent with losses. To deal with that, we need to deal with the fundamental underlying issues that are driving up insurance costs. That's what we're doing with Bill 41 and the accompanying regulatory changes.

Mr. Speaker, if we would follow along with the advice of the opposition, the advice that we're hearing tonight of leaving a rate cap in place, we would end up with a failed automobile insurance system. I think that would be their goal because they've talked very favourably of a nationalized approach. That would be the only option if we didn't deal with the underlying factors and imposed a rate cap. We would have a failed system which would have to be nationalized, and that would put us in the same situation that B.C. is in today with a nationalized automobile insurance system.

I just want to make a few comments on B.C.'s system, a system that the members opposite, I believe, would like to emulate. B.C.'s system is the costliest system in the country. In 2018 and 2019 ICBC lost \$2.8 billion. The Attorney General called it a dumpster fire, Mr. Speaker. If we took the advice of the members opposite by imposing a rate cap only, ultimately what would happen is that we would have a dumpster fire in this province because we would have to nationalize the automobile insurance industry.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 41 deals with the underlying issues that have contributed to increasing premiums. I call on the members to support the passing of this bill to bring rate relief, premium relief, to Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for St. Albert has the call.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 41, Insurance (Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care) Amendment Act, 2020. Just before I talk a little bit more about this piece of legislation, the analysis of the legislation, I just wanted to respond to the Minister of Finance, who seems to think that all that we can suggest is a rate cap. Well, no, that's not entirely correct. A rate cap was something that we introduced or brought in because it had an immediate effect, and I think we could all probably agree that getting rid of it has resulted in the premiums escalating.

9:30

But I would suggest that there are a lot of things that you can do at the same time because it is quite possible to walk and chew gum at the same time. If the minister is thinking about, you know, addressing or changing some of the ways that people with different injuries are supported or compensated, then I would suggest he do that in tandem with the Minister of Health and actually look at: what are the supports that are available to people that sustain brain injury, whether it is through a series of concussions or one concussion or simply a traumatic brain injury? There are a lot of things we can actually do.

Anyway, actually, you know, the 5 per cent rate cap: I think all of us can probably agree that we've heard from constituents at different times who are not very happy with the rise in premiums with insurance. We knew this was going to happen. It certainly did happen. For some drivers, sadly, their insurance premiums are worth more than their vehicles, which is not good.

Once again, the UCP announced a panel, in December 2019, to review insurance. I'm not really going to talk about who was on their panel and how they arrived at the suggestions that they did, but it seems reasonable to assume that this particular panel, like so many of the UCP panels, failed to really solicit feedback or to

include the ideas of a range of people. I was curious to see. I knew we were going to be talking about Bill 41, so I thought: well, let's have a look and see; let's look at the lobbyist registry. Interestingly enough, if anybody – that is, I'm sure, the three or four people that are watching tonight – is interested, you can actually search the Alberta lobbyist registry to see who are the organizations and the people that have been lobbying the government of Alberta and which ministries they have been lobbying. You can probably, you know, make some fairly safe assumptions about what they're asking for, particularly given the legislation that we've seen drop in the last couple of weeks.

Weirdly enough, Alberta Motor Association, November 11 and November 10. Insurance Brokers Association of Alberta and Aviva, November 2. In October we had Sun Life, and then, of course, a number of UCP insiders that were representing different companies. We certainly had the Insurance Bureau of Canada. You know, what I didn't see in that lobbyist registry were any groups that actually support Albertans who are living their lives with brain injury right now, that could be living their lives with the result of sustaining a concussion or multiple concussions. I did not see any of that, so it makes sense why we are seeing the changes that we are seeing.

Anyway, one of the things that we brought forward and that we've asked for a number of times – I understand that the Minister of Finance just does not want to budge on putting back a cap to help out the people of Alberta who are struggling right now. I think we can all agree that a lot of people have either lost their jobs, lost hours, lost wages, are forced to stay home with children. Things are tough right now. You know, we've heard a few people talk about the fact that a lot of vehicles are these huge paperweights right now, just sitting in the driveway. We are not using them. So there actually has been a savings, I would suggest, even a savings to insurance companies.

I mean, if there is an upside to this pandemic – it's sort of hard to see sometimes – we've learned that there are a lot of things that we can do online. There are a lot of things that we can do without contact. There are a lot of savings that way. I don't have the stats in front of me, but I think it's a safe assumption to believe that the number of collisions is likely down given the decrease in time that we're spending driving. All of these things are happening right now. There's less driving, there's less risk, there are overall efficiencies, there's less cost to the insurance industry's use of Internet through multiple distribution channels, all kinds of things that have changed. But still the Minister of Finance refuses to recognize that putting back a cap or at least putting back a cap even for a short amount of time to support Albertans through this difficult time – that is apparently not good enough.

I'm going to talk a little bit about one of the pieces that is being altered in this piece of legislation. That is section 2, and that's around the right to call experts. Section 2 adds section 558.1, which is the right to call an expert witness in the Insurance Act. It adds definitions for a joint expert, motor vehicle injury damages, motor vehicle injury proceeding. It goes on, sets out in regulation that a motor vehicle injury with damages over \$100,000 cannot have more than three experts to access the claim and only one report can be issued. If the claim is under \$100,000 for an injury, there can only be one expert and one report. It goes on. There are a few other sections that are changed. But, really, let's talk about what this does for Albertans. Really, once a final settlement is reached, insurers pay for medical reports and court costs – we know this – and this limits their payout amounts. It limits the ability of victims to introduce all the evidence they feel is necessary to make their claim, which indirectly will result in lower net payouts to victims.

I find it interesting that this particular government would limit the expertise that is being offered in order to make a decision. Now let's compare that to another system within government that is almost the complete opposite. When an Albertan is applying for, let's say, something like AISH benefits, they go through a very lengthy process specific to health, health related to their disability. It is not unusual for the government of Alberta to request reports from multiple experts – from physicians, probably from family physicians, from psychologists, from psychiatrists, from mental health professionals, from disability professionals – all kinds of reports. Often when those are submitted, it comes back to the person, and they are told, "Wait, they need one more," so they need to go see one more expert. It seems incredible to me that this piece of legislation seeks to limit the amount of expertise that is offered before a decision is made, yet in another breath, in another system of government it is quite the opposite. It tells you a lot about what has been lobbied for and who this government is listening to.

I also want to talk about the changes to the direct compensation property damage system. These changes make it so a driver will now be directly paid out for the damage to their vehicle and property by their insurer for damages. Seems pretty straightforward. We'll have to see how that works.

Subsection (4) also states that the degree of fault will be prescribed by regulation and gives power to cabinet to determine the degree of fault in various situations through regulation, and (5) provides the right to resolution, to bring disputes to court, and subsection (6) gives capabilities for dispute resolution outlined in section 519 of the Insurance Act. Technically, this is the beginning, as my colleagues have said, of no-fault insurance, which is outlined further in the report that was submitted and the recommendation. Now, let's be clear about what no-fault insurance does. It takes away the right to sue and will create standard payouts for specific injuries. These changes don't deal with the complexity and variation of the type of injury that occurs.

I would just like to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, and talk a little bit about those injuries. Let's say that we decide that this particular category of injury, brain injury – that is, a concussion – we're going to cap at this financial amount, whatever that amount is. Let's say that it's \$5,000, it's \$10,000. Let me tell you that that will never ever cover the cost of a disability.

Let me explain why. All of the things that are associated with that – and concussions can range from very mild symptoms that a person is able to recover from to life-altering changes that the person will never recover from, that require such intense relearning of everything they knew. Sometimes that includes learning physical movement – how to walk, how to run, how to do all of those household tasks – remembering the people in your life, remembering words, remembering tasks, learning how to drive all over again but also maybe having to get a vehicle that is now adapted. Perhaps your arms don't work the same way, so you need hand controls to control everything with one hand. Maybe you need gas and brakes on a hand control. All of these things cost money. Maybe you need a lift in your vehicle. All of those things cost money.

9:40

People don't often understand that when somebody sustains a brain injury, although to look at them you probably wouldn't be able to tell that anything has changed, it doesn't take long to figure out that a lot has changed. Very often survivors of a brain injury, often only labelled as having a concussion, have to make massive alterations to their homes. Now, government members will say: but, yes, we have these programs; we have a residential adaptation

modification program, or we have this little grant, or we have that. Those are fine, and those help with little alterations, but they do not meet the ongoing needs of people with brain injury. When you have to do modifications to your home, perhaps you need to lower all of the light switches. Maybe you need to lower the thermostat. Maybe you need to change things in your kitchen so somebody can cook seated. You may need to attach grab bars in the washroom. You may need a roll-in shower as opposed to a regular bathtub and shower because you can no longer manage lifting your legs that high, all of these things.

There are so many things, not to mention the incredible mental health stress that comes along with a brain injury or a concussion. Now, very often you have people that are surviving these injuries relearning all of these things, reordering their lives, changing the way things go, and they also have to deal with the mental health pressures that come with that. That could be depression. That could be loss, loss of who they used to be, loss of a relationship because the disability now has changed you so immensely that that has ended. That's not unusual. All of these things are fairly normal. That therapy is required not just for a short period of time but for an extended period of time so that that Albertan can find a new way forward, whether that's preparing for a new job, preparing for a new relationship, really sort of relearning who they are and what their place is in the world. The reason that I'm going on about this is that I am trying my best to impress upon the government the need to recognize that there is an immense cost associated with sustaining an injury that some people will call a minor injury, which it is not. It absolutely is not.

Now, add to that the fact that we're in austerity mode, and we've got a government that is intent on racing us to the bottom, so all of these supports that people, the people that I'm describing, people that will have sustained an injury, whether it's a concussion, brain injury, whatever you want to call it, really rely on have become increasingly scarce and increasingly difficult to access. Imagine how weird that would be. A person cannot sue to get the funds that they need to sustain themselves for the rest of their lives following an injury, so now they have to turn to the government of Alberta for benefits. That might mean AISH. Suddenly it's really tough to get on AISH because you have to get all of these reports to talk about how severe your injury is, how permanent it is, and how much it impacts your life. Then you might need rent support because you can't afford to pay market rent on what AISH pays.

But all of this could have been taken care of at the point of injury by allowing the person who was injured, whose life was impacted, to get what they needed. But that is gone. It doesn't really make a lot of sense to me, how on the one hand the government claims: "We are saving Albertans money by doing this. This is the whole point of this. We are going to eventually get there, so we lower premiums, and this is good for Albertans." It's not. It's short-sighted because they are missing the point that there is a cost. There is a huge cost to this, not just a human cost, but there is a huge cost to this.

One of the things I would like to know: I'd like the minister, if he has the opportunity to rise to answer this question . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I could just provide a cautionary note. If you would like to have personal and private conversations, I encourage you to do that in the respective lounges.

I'm also happy to provide Standing Order 29(2)(a). It's available, and I did see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the privilege of standing and speaking here in the House this evening. I certainly was listening with great interest to my colleague from St. Albert's comments on a measure to refer the bill to committee. Of course,

many of her remarks reminded me of my time as a DATS bus driver many years ago while attending university. I drove, actually, full-time a DATS bus while attending university full-time, which made for some pretty long days. It was good practice for what we're doing here tonight.

On those shifts where I drove, quite often at night, in my DATS bus, of course, many passengers were those who were using wheelchairs or other forms of assistance and making use of DATS, the disabled adult transportation system, for their needs to get around the city. Of course, they were doing so because they'd been injured in some way. Many of them had been injured in automobile accidents, and as a result of that, they had severe limitations on their mobility and were quite often in wheelchairs or used crutches or some other forms of assistance to get around.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, the stories would quite often be in depth over the course of the three or so years that I drove for DATS. Passengers would often be repeat passengers, and I would get to know their stories and understand how the injuries that they had suffered had affected their lives.

Believe me, in all that time I never met one passenger who'd been injured in an automobile accident who was living high on the hog. There was not one of them who was getting rich from the monies they may or may not have received as a result of the payout from an insurance settlement. They were suffering, Madam Speaker. It was really heart-wrenching to see the low levels of income that folks were struggling to get by on while they dealt with the tremendous injuries caused by automobile accidents and while they had to try to live on the small amounts of money that resulted from settlements that they received. There's no king's ransom that was paid out to the passengers that I met during my time as a driver for injured passengers who got their transportation via the disabled adult transportation system.

The decision by this government now to listen to the insurance lobby and exclude the well-being of Albertans in general I think speaks to a pattern of callousness that we see across the board from this government, whether they are looking at off-loading or downloading costs from themselves to other jurisdictions, for example with taxation in rural municipalities, changing the tax rules so that oil and gas companies don't have to pay their taxes to rural municipalities, leaving them strapped and having to raise their taxes and not knowing how they're going to make ends meet.

This pattern of downloading responsibility and shuffling the tax burden away from the provincial government to municipalities and individual Albertans is exemplified once again in the measures that we see here in Bill 41, which transfers a billion dollars from Albertans to the pockets of profitable insurance companies. That money is a direct emptying of available cash from Albertans' pockets at a time when they desperately could have used it. If a government really analyzes its bottom-line responsibilities, it should know that at its core its responsibility is to look after the individual Albertans who need help the most.

Certainly, yes, businesses have to survive – we understand that – but I just looked up, Madam Speaker, the number of insurance companies who've failed in Canada, and, believe me, it's a pretty small number. So food for thought.

9:50

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Always a pleasure to see you in this chair. It seems that every time I get up

to speak, you're the one in the chair. Yeah. Not always. But it's a pleasure for me to get up and speak to Bill 41, Insurance (Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care) Amendment Act, 2020, and here we have yet another example of how this UCP government continues to play favourites with the specific stakeholders which they connect with.

I will go into detail on some of the realities that this particular piece of legislation actually will be bringing into effect if it were to pass, but I wanted to state emphatically that I'm just surprised that this government isn't looking at other options – I'll put it that way – to see how they can actually help Albertans. Of course, as we all know, we're here to represent those Albertans, so by reaching out to them, I actually wanted to share a few responses, Madam Speaker, from Albertans who are actually letting me know how it's affecting them.

For example, we have Andrea. She wrote to me and said: "I had an accident last fall. My fault. My insurance increased from \$100 to \$150 a month and now covers basically nothing." She continued: "I expected them to go up, but I wasn't expecting to lose coverage. If I get into another accident, my finances are not going to be good, and I have kids. I need to have a working vehicle. Thanks for listening and caring."

Samuel states, "Getting insurance . . ." – oh. Sorry. I can't use that word. It's unparliamentary. I'll say that "getting insurance is difficult for new immigrants settling in Alberta. You're asked to pay a hefty premium and a full-year payment before the policy is created. Same criteria even after driving for one year with no claims. Also, your rate increases no matter what."

More people go on to respond, saying: "Insurance is expensive, and I think I'm in an upper tier as an experienced driver with a class 1. I get one speeding ticket a year because I have a car that goes vroom, and I like to enjoy that occasionally. Still seeing these increases every year. I've been licensed since 1991, and it continues to go up."

Another individual writes, "A \$500 increase; no change in driver status" and then something else I can't actually say on the record because it wouldn't be parliamentary.

But, you know, these are real Albertans, Madam Speaker, and they're communicating to me the reality that they're having to go through with the decisions made by this particular government.

Now, I wanted to bring this all together because the fact is that the UCP did three things that have to be considered in concert with respect to auto insurance. Of course, they introduced this particular bill, Bill 41, and then they changed four regulations governing auto insurance, and then they released a report on the future direction of the system.

Now, because Bill 41 and the regulations work in tandem, it's important to understand how both work to support the insurance lobby. Moreover, the report, which is over 500 pages, very clearly outlines the government's future direction, and it's in alignment with the initial steps taken through Bill 41 and the regulatory changes. For example, Bill 41 does the following. It modifies prejudgment interest. It lowers it from 4 per cent to 1.5 per cent, and the interest only begins accruing to the victim when a statement of their claim or written notice of a statement of a claim is filed.

Now, why is this important, and how is it impacting Albertans? Previously the interest on a prospective claim's final payout begins on the day of the accident. How is this actually in the interests of Albertans? It's obviously in the interests of the insurance companies, Madam Speaker. You'd think that this UCP government – well, you know, we're here to represent everybody – would take a more balanced approach, but as we pointed out with a number of pieces of legislation, this government is anything but balanced. If they have it their way, they're going to take us back in

time. In fact, I do believe it was the Premier himself that said that if he could have any superpower, it would be to time travel. Wasn't that it?

An Hon. Member: To go back in time.

Member Loyola: He wanted to go back in time. He wanted to go back in time.

Mr. Schmidt: He wanted to turn back time, just like Cher.

Member Loyola: Turn back time, just like Cher: "If I could just turn back time..." I'm going to spare you my singing, Madam Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Come on.

Member Loyola: Well, I could lay it down for you if you really wanted me to.

This is what we're experiencing with this UCP government, and it's no surprise. I don't know why it is, but they feel really comfortable back in the 1950s, you know, as most Conservatives do. I'm not exactly sure what it is that they're trying to conserve and why they want to go back that far and why they're so scared of modernizing and moving into making Alberta a more modern place to live. I mean, things are changing every day. Change is inevitable. At the end of the day, though, we have to make sure that the laws that are coming out of this House are impacting people in a balanced and beneficial way and not just a specific group of people.

As I was saying, previously the interest on a prospective claim's final payout begins on the day of the accident. As it often takes a year to file a claim, victims will see a significantly reduced final compensation. This, to me, is unfair. I want to give you an example, Madam Speaker. Let's say that I get rear-ended and I have permanent spinal damage. Let's say that it took one year to file a claim and one year to settle it, and let's say that a settlement is reached for \$200,000 for lifetime pain and suffering. Previously that final award would have accrued an additional \$8,000 in prejudgment interest before the claim was filed. That was before, at 4 per cent, so \$8,000 in interest during the settlement phase, which is at 4 per cent. Now, under the old rules the final payout would be \$216,000, but under the new legislation there is no interest accrued before the statement of claim is filed, as we've already established – this is what's actually in the bill – and only \$3,000 in interest at 1.5 per cent during the settlement phase. Under the new legislation, in this example, the final payment goes down to \$203,000.

Insurers benefit from this change in two ways. First, the change in interest rate and the timing of when it applies save the insurance companies monies, of course. With respect to the example above it reduces the net payout by \$13,000, or 6 per cent. While this isn't a huge change for the victim, across the entire industry this adds up to a lot of money.

Second, the change tilts the playing field in favour of the insurance companies at the expense of the victims. Because the interest rate of 1.5 per cent is so low, the insurance companies have no incentive to settle. They can make more in interest on their capital that they have set aside to finally pay out the claim than they do in the prejudgment interest. The result is longer settlement times for victims and more money for insurance companies. Now, what I would really love is for one of the members on the other side, specifically in cabinet, to actually get up and address this issue, Madam Speaker. How does this benefit Albertans more? Give me the argument, because, I mean, essentially that's what we're here to do. We're here to debate these issues.

10:00

I'm doing my best to listen to Albertans. They write me. They tell me what they're experiencing, and I can't tell you the number of people who've actually written me and have told me that their insurance has actually gone up, depending on the individual, of course, anywhere from 17 to 26 per cent. A number of people have written me that. Now, 17 per cent: that's a lot. You know, families, especially that – like, well, for example, Andrea, who's telling me that she's got two kids. She absolutely needs a vehicle to get around. As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar pointed out – and I really liked the way that he put it – we live in a car-centric . . .

Mr. Schmidt: A car-centric province.

Member Loyola: . . . province. That's the reality. I share that with you, too, Madam Speaker.

Like, I have the honour of receiving guests because, as I've shared in this House before, in my particular constituency 50 per cent of the people that actually live in the constituency are from diverse ethnic backgrounds. A lot of people, when they have guests – of course, this was mainly before COVID. It doesn't happen so much now with COVID happening right now. But pre-COVID, when people would have international guests come and visit them, they'd always be, like: hey, let's go see the MLA. I had the opportunity to, like, meet with so many people. You know what? One of the things that they – not everybody, of course, but a lot of them actually point out, like: "Wow, here in Edmonton and across this province you really need a vehicle to get around. Your public transportation system doesn't compare to, for example, where I come from."

You know, we have a couple of lines here in Edmonton. I can tell you, for example, that in Buenos Aires, Argentina, they have 16 lines. In Ciudad de México, Mexico City, I think they have about 12 lines. In Santiago, Chile, where I was actually born, I think they have 11 lines. They put a lot of time and money into public transportation because they want the population to be able to get around.

Now, going back to the issue here, here in Alberta, unfortunately, we don't have that kind of investment in public transportation, where we would like it to be. Hopefully, one day, when we have, you know, a government that actually wants to look forward to the future and modernize this province and especially modernize and diversify our economy and start making life better for Albertans, for all Albertans, not just a select few, we'll be able to make those investments in due time.

But for now, Madam Speaker, the reality is that a lot of Albertans need that vehicle to get around, especially if you have kids. You know, I'm sure many members in this House have children. I have two of my own, two beautiful boys. They're 11 and 16 years old. I can tell you that when they were young, trying to get from place A to place B, having to take them to doctors' appointments, dentists' appointments, to the optometrist, trying to do it on public transportation was very difficult, and there were a few times where I actually did that. So when mothers like Andrea write me and say, "Hey, I absolutely need a vehicle to get around," I get it. I may not know exactly what her experience is, but I can empathize.

I know what it's like to have those kids and have to get around, have to depend on a vehicle. This is the really tough part. Here we are: Albertans are stuck between a rock and a hard place because they need that vehicle in order to get around, yet now we have this government that is putting into place this particular piece of legislation that is already making . . .

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate all of the comments from the opposition. Apparently, they missed the portion where the minister spoke about the bill and some of the items here. Right now we're speaking on an amendment motion. I've been really trying to capture what the folks were saying from the opposition to see if maybe I was missing something, because when I read through the bill and when I talked to my constituents, I didn't quite hear it the same way. You know, we had some issues.

I believe the member from Beverly, when he was in the Chamber, when we're both speaking on it, agreed with me. He agreed with me in the sense that the opposition, when they were in power, Madam Speaker, through you to them, literally stuck a Band-Aid, so the little Dutch boy who sticks his finger in the dike. It's kind of the same thing. The folks in my constituency get that. Prior to our government coming in place and prior to the minister actually taking it on and trying to deal with the issue, the last group: they put a temporary Band-Aid fix.

Now, I don't know if it was by accident or by design that it was also during an election cycle, so that as soon as there were to be a change, which there was, the group coming in would have to actually deal with the problem, or we could have elected to keep the little Dutch boy with his finger stuck in the side of the earth dam here to try to hold it back. Now, that isn't what took place.

Now, what the people in my constituency were experiencing – because we understand car-centric as well, given that we're in God's country and literally about Edmonton, we have folks that commute both to and from Edmonton to God's country in my area. Also, we have children that have to take school buses. We have children that have to get out to different activities, and most of it, a lot of times, often, is either highway driving or on gravel roads. Now, these same folks have had insurance for a number of years. They saw their rates increasing. They saw issues with it while the Band-Aid was still being put in there, because what was happening, Madam Speaker? There was becoming less and less of a pool for services because of what was taking place. I know the members opposite hate to admit it; we're still in a free capital market enterprise. Because of that pool being limited, the services that were being provided by a lot of those insurance providers couldn't be given.

Myself, personally, I have to shop around again even through my broker to find insurance for the basic coverage we've had for years, both on commercial equipment, commercial vehicles, personal vehicles, and otherwise. So when I have constituents calling, going, "What in the heck is going on? My insurance is going up," absolutely. Absolutely, it's gone up. Absolutely, we're having issues with it. Because we're addressing it, we had to pull off that temporary cap. Oh, by the way, we didn't really pull it off. It was going to expire, kind of like planting, you know, a trap somewhere along the road that you happen to step into. It's inevitably going to be stepped on because it was already planted there. That's what we're dealing with. When I explain that to my constituents, they get it.

I want to thank the minister for actually tearing into the issue and addressing the problem. When they keep talking about these wedge items, where we happen to be opening the door to – I don't know – universal service or something else similar to B.C., it couldn't be further from the truth, Madam Speaker. Again, if they were in the room when I had spoken before and which the member from Beverly also agreed to, the temporary Band-Aid fix never addressed it.

We're not going down the path of British Columbia. It's not going to be a no-fault type of system. When the minister is

referencing that, it's more along the lines of that instead of you waiting as the claimant – if anyone has ever been in an accident – for the insurance company to decide which fault it was while they go back and forth between each other and you're sitting there for a year, two years sometimes in some cases, waiting for them to make the decision, what's been proposed here is that actually you get paid out first, and then the insurance companies, because they've got the big bank accounts behind them, can deal with it.

It also gives you – I know I'm going to date myself. Back in the days of cable, you could actually select what you wanted for services or a satellite or whatever. We want to jump back in that wayback machine, but forgetting our past and our history is a good way to repeat it. You actually had better options and better choices based on your driving habits. Based on what you're doing, you'll have that selection.

The Member for Lethbridge-West, I believe, had talked about the tort laws. Yeah, we're one of the last jurisdictions where the tort laws were still taking place. They had a bunch of these high-priced lawyers that were coming out here and doing all that. Chasing ambulances, I think, is how that works out in, you know, the commonspeak.

Again, folks out there, we're actually trying to address it. I strongly suggest to the members in the Chamber here to vote against the amendment that was put forward. Let's get back on the regular bill so we can put some legislation in place that stops that poor little Dutch boy from trying to hold back a deluge of flooding. Address the issue, address the problem, and get us back to work. Madam Speaker, in the area when I talk to my folks, when they come up to our town halls and they're talking to me, they said something very simple: we hired you to do a job; we expect you to do it for us. Despite the rhetoric that is taking place, they put us here for a reason. To the minister: thank you for taking that as job number one, listening to that advice. Let's carry forward and let's get this insurance problem fixed.

Thank you.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate on the referral motion on Bill 41? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is always a pleasure to rise in this House. I said the same thing at about this time last evening, that while the content of many of the bills we see in front of us is not something that I'm proud to speak about with my constituents, I'm certainly always proud to be their representative in the Legislature and cannot forget just how privileged we are to be in this Chamber, particularly when we think about folks on the front lines right now who are working so incredibly hard for us in the toughest of situations. That's not just health care workers, but that's essential workers and everyone who's doing so much on the front lines, so thank you.

I want to also note that I'm speaking about Bill 41 this evening, the Insurance (Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care) Amendment Act, 2020, which, as I will talk about shortly, is a bit of an interesting choice of a name for a bill, which seems to be a trend with this government. As well, I would say, through the chair, of course, that many of the names of the bills do not reflect the content within. One example would be Bill 39, the child care and early learning act, which uses the term "early learning" but does not address early learning whatsoever. I found that quite interesting. I did take the time as well to read through Bill 41, and I want to echo the comments of many of my colleagues tonight who shared that it's just so critical that we refer this bill to committee because – well, for a number of reasons.

One of the biggest ones is around consultation and around what we're hearing from our constituents. Before I get into that, I do want to note as well that I actually noticed a post from the Minister of Transportation earlier today, and he noted that today is the National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims. I appreciate the minister pointing that out, and it's quite relevant to the debate ahead of us as well.

You know, we've seen from the outset that this government's handling of auto insurance has been a mess, and who pays the price? Well, it's Albertans. It's our constituents, and what's most alarming – well, there are a lot of things that are alarming about this piece of legislation – is how this government continues to prioritize companies and prioritize corporations over people and prioritize profits over people.

They've let those extremely profitable insurance corporations hold the pen on this piece of legislation, on Bill 41, and in fact we saw in this UCP government's own report that they've released that that same industry, the insurance industry, has pocketed an additional \$820 million in premiums from hard-working Albertans. They've already benefited from a \$4.7 billion corporate handout, and, you know, we can't say that figure enough on the record because I can tell you that I'm hearing that back from my constituents all the time.

It was a member in this House earlier tonight who talked about how, pointing to our side of the House, we need to get out and speak with constituents. Well, I can assure you – and I am quite confident in speaking for the other members here in the Chamber tonight on our side – that we are absolutely speaking to our constituents. It might be a little bit different. You know, I'm certainly not knocking on doors. But as a replacement, I'm making a whole heck of a lot of phone calls.

I can tell you that there are a few common themes coming through on those phone calls. And let me tell you, to preface this, that it's not just NDP supporters I'm hearing from. In fact, I had a very good conversation with a constituent of Calgary-Klein who is a UCP supporter, but guess what he shared with me? He shared with me his grave concerns with the direction that the party he voted for is taking our province. You know, I can point to a whole number of other examples as well.

What are some of the things that they're saying? Again, the \$4.7 billion corporate handout. Probably the most common theme that I hear is around affordability. That's probably one of my biggest concerns with Bill 41. Again, let's look at the name: Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care. In fact, I want to point out that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie solicited feedback from folks even tonight on social media, just saying: hey, I want to hear your thoughts on insurance. What did they say? A number of them said that their insurance premiums have increased rapidly. Huge, huge rates.

One example of many is of a young person saying that she's finding it hard to make ends meet. I can give you countless examples in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood where people are struggling. It's from this government that continues to make their lives more difficult. It's just that insurance is the next area where this government feels like nickel and diming Albertans.

It was interesting. I heard – and, you know, my colleagues can perhaps correct me if I didn't quite hear this accurately. I was paying close attention to the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland's comments, and he said – again, I was paying attention and I jotted this down: “When my constituents phone me up and say that their insurance went up, I say, “Yes. Absolutely.” Again, we don't have the benefit of the Blues yet, but I am certain we will shortly, and . . .

Ms Phillips: At 10:08 p.m.

Member Irwin: At 10:08 p.m. Thank you, Lethbridge-West.

I can't imagine responding to my constituents in that manner. I would respond with compassion and with acknowledgement, “I'm sorry to hear that your insurance rates have gone up,” especially when I'm hearing from those same folks that they're struggling with paying rent, with making their mortgage payments. I hear from AISH recipients all the time who are just absolutely struggling.

In fact, my colleague from St. Albert and I had an incredible meeting not too long ago with a number of folks who live in McCauley Apartments in my riding. Everybody who lives in – actually, nearly everybody who lives in McCauley Apartments is a recipient of AISH. They shared with us just how difficult it is to get by day to day.

Sure, you know, a lot of those folks don't have cars and could not afford them, and I know the Member for St. Albert is nodding because she recently lived, in the month of October, on an AISH budget. One of the first things she realized – I don't want to put words in her mouth, but she is nodding along – was that she could not afford a car. So she moved towards public transit because she recognized that it wasn't just the cost of insurance but gas, all those things that make it very challenging for folks to get by. Again, the audacity of that member to respond to his constituents in that manner is quite alarming. You know, I want to say, because I hear from the odd constituent in his riding as well, to any of those folks that are watching that, you know, on our side, the Alberta NDP, we absolutely have your backs, and we will fight for your lives to be more affordable.

10:20

You know what? I also want to point out that, you know, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie made some really good points about the fact that certainly some folks can't afford to have a vehicle, but we do have a fairly car-centric province, a car-centric city. You know, my hope would be that we could invest in public transit and we could invest in the infrastructure needed to have a robust public transit system so we could take some cars off the road. But until we get there, we need to support Albertans because many of them have no choice but to drive. Absolutely. I did it, actually. I was car-free for years myself here in Edmonton, and it was hard, and not everybody is crazy like me and can run or bike to work every day, so we need to consider that as well.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the other pieces of Bill 41 that are quite troubling. I've talked about affordability, because certainly that's a huge concern for me, but also about consultation. I'd ask this government, and perhaps some of the members opposite will stand up and weigh in on this: who was consulted other than your lobbyist friends? Who was consulted other than those insurance companies that we've said – your own report, in fact, through the chair, of course, notes that we're talking hundreds of millions of dollars of profit for those insurance companies. Who was consulted beyond that? We'd love to hear that.

The other concern I want to raise, and in fact a few of my colleagues have really talked about this far better than I have, because they've shared their own personal stories. In fact, I was in this Chamber a couple of days ago, and my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs talked about her grave concerns around concussions being considered a minor injury. She talked about being a hockey mom, and she also talked about an example of someone in her own life whose life was irreparably changed due to a car accident. So I ask, you know: in what world is a concussion considered a minor injury?

Again, I'm very fortunate in that I don't have a personal story to share, but I know how life-altering concussions can be. I have to ask, you know: why did this same minister end the cap on insurance so abruptly? You know, I've said – gosh, I'll have to check *Hansard*, but I've said it a lot in this House – that we're in the midst of a pandemic. We have all heard from so many Albertans, so many of our constituents who are struggling. On our side of the House, when we hold town halls, when we have Facebook Live, we keep our comments open, and we actually take questions and comments from the audience, and it's a very good way to engage with folks, not just our supporters. We've found through this level of stakeholder engagement that we've really been able to reach a lot of Albertans during a pandemic.

The UCP might want to consider, you know, taking a similar approach instead of just hearing from their family members, as an example. Through this level of stakeholder engagement, though, we can truly say that, like, people are struggling. No one we've heard from has asked for their insurance rates to go up, right?

I wonder if those members opposite are reading their e-mails as well because I can pull up – I'll actually try this and see if I can table some in future debate – some of the e-mails that I've received from folks who have experienced 10, 15 per cent. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie shared an example of a 25 per cent increase. That would be a huge impact for any of us in this House, and we make very fair salaries, so imagine that impact on someone who has lost their job or someone who does not make as good a salary as we do.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. [interjection] Excuse me. Order. The hon. Member for St. Albert under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and offer a couple of thoughts and then a question for my colleague. I was intrigued by some of her comments, and she was quite right in talking about the deliberate lack of consultation. I mean, I certainly don't have access to the minister's schedule, so I couldn't tell you specifically that he only consulted with the lobbyists that you can find on the lobbyist registry, where, you know, there are a lot of health care providers and insurance companies. I'm not going to draw too many conclusions about that.

But what I didn't see there were organizations that have a lot of expertise around supporting people who are survivors of concussion, multiple concussions, or brain injury. Some of those, for some of the members who might not know who those organizations are, are right in their communities. You know, had they looked around and consulted, they would have found them, maybe got some good information about why changes that are being proposed in this piece of legislation maybe aren't a great idea. Some of those are, obviously, we all know, the Glenrose hospital: they have some incredible physicians and therapists that could probably spend a few days talking to you about some of the stresses and financial stresses associated with brain injury. Also, we've got Blue Heron, which is an Alberta-based organization that I think members from, you know, Vegreville maybe should have gone and talked to. We've got Halvar Jonson Centre in Ponoka: I'm surprised that the minister or even some of the members opposite didn't take the time to go and consult. We've also got the Southern Alberta Brain Injury Society. We've got the Parkland Head Injury society.

I guess my question is to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I would like to know, in her opinion – I think she talked a little bit about some of the poor qualities of the recent UCP consultation efforts, particularly, you know, a recent open Facebook discussion about parks, but specifically as it relates to this

piece of legislation, I would like her to maybe just continue about what she thinks are important qualities of open, fair consultation that reaches all stakeholders, not just friends and insiders.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Okay. Thank you. Yeah. The question was – and it is quite relevant to Bill 41 – around, you know: what does make effective consultation and dialogue on a piece of legislation on this matter? I think the Member for St. Albert very much nailed it in pointing out that this government had an opportunity to consult with a whole number of organizations. You mentioned Blue Heron; you mentioned a number of organizations in rural Alberta in particular, right? Again, I feel a bit like *déjà vu* is happening in my life because on so many pieces of legislation that we've seen in this House to date, this government has failed to consult. In this case they've failed to consult the very Albertans that this piece of legislation impacts the most. What we see is that they've consulted the large, profitable insurance companies but no one else. Until I hear the minister stand in this House and explain who else they've consulted, we have to assume that that's who this government prioritizes. That's who this government is looking out for, not average Albertans, who everyone on this side of the House, at least, is hearing from and who are absolutely struggling with affordability.

10:30

I want to thank the member as well for raising the fact that, I mean, there are so many organizations that do such important work when it comes to addressing injuries. I think about organizations that help folks who've been traumatized. We can point to other pieces of legislation in this House where this government has attacked those organizations, has taken away funding, as an example.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate on amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I know we've had robust debate here on the referral amendment to Bill 41, which I encourage members on the government side to not support.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 35

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

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

Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 17: Member Irwin]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment HA on Bill 35. Are there any members wishing to join debate? The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to have an opportunity to rise to speak on this amendment to this motion for second reading, that it not be read again. It's a hoist, I believe. Anyhoo, I'm very pleased to speak in favour of that motion. The reason for that, as I suspect will not come as a huge surprise to you, Madam Speaker, is that our caucus is not in support of moving forward with Bill 35. In fact, we would prefer that Bill 35, the Tax Statutes ([Theoretically] Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, not move any further through this House. The reasons for that are considerable.

There are many pieces of this bill, and I look forward to speaking to particular elements of it when we get into committee. I know there are more elements to it than just the issue of the corporate income tax rate and the function that this bill serves, which is, of course, to accelerate the corporate income tax cut, otherwise known as the \$4.7 billion corporate handout. There are other elements to it. I do understand that. However, I want to spend the majority of my time speaking about the inadvisability of this particular initiative on the part of this government because it truly is not in the best interests of the vast, vast majority of Albertans. Not only is it not in their best interests; it will unfortunately be part of a series of decisions that will trigger a number of actions that will significantly hurt regular Albertans and their family members for years and years to come.

Let's start, of course, with the matter that I think is, you know, not absolutely front of mind but one of the two or three key elements that are close to front of mind for most Albertans and certainly, I'm sure, many people in this House, which is the issue of the fiscal challenges that this government is facing right now. I want to talk about that because, of course, by giving up \$4.7 billion – in fact, let's be clear: it's more than that. That's just over a four-year period. Actually, I think it was a three-year period as identified on page 144 of the budget documents that accompanied the original plan to move forward with this income tax handout. In fact, it's not just \$4.7 billion because, of course, that's just over three years, and every year that it goes on, there's more money that is lost. In fact, ironically, as the economy grows, Albertans actually lose even more money, so it's actually worth quite a bit more than that. That's important because we're making a decision to forgo billions and billions of dollars in our coffers, and that obviously has significant consequences to our fiscal health in relation to the books of the provincial government and, ultimately, the obligations that rest on the shoulders of Alberta taxpayers.

We have a fiscal challenge. Is getting rid of \$4.7 billion of revenue over the course of three years a good idea in the face of that fiscal challenge? Well, I would argue no, at least not unless it actually contributes to some other offsetting benefit, and I will get to the fact that I don't believe that that is one of the outcomes of this decision. But let's just talk for a moment about the fiscal challenges that this government faces. I find that, you know, it's probably a bit ironic to a lot of people out there who have bought into this idea that the NDP is not really a fiscal management focused party and that, in fact, everyone should look to Conservatives to do a better job of running the fiscal books of a province. Now, that's a narrative, of course, that many on the right have been reasonably successful at promoting in our political discourse over the last two, three, four decades. Now, as I'm sure members opposite have heard me say, we know the facts actually don't back that up.

We know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer of the federal government went through an analysis of the fiscal records of provincial governments and federal governments over the course of a 20-year period, or maybe it was a 30-year period, and actually concluded that the party that was most likely to bring about fiscal responsibility and balanced budgets was the NDP. So that's actually

our record. I know it's irritating for the members opposite when we do things like research and bring up facts and things like that; nonetheless, it's really important to remind people of that.

Now, there is no question that notwithstanding that that Parliamentary Budget Officer report was completed – and it gave some credence to the fact that, “No, actually, people should sometimes think of looking to the NDP when it comes to fiscal responsibility” – you know, one could argue that that position was somewhat challenged by the experience that our previous government had from 2015 to 2019, when the bottom dropped out of the price of oil, and we at one point saw a deficit go over \$10 billion. You know, it was striking and disconcerting and worrisome to us at the time, and it certainly was to all Albertans, and well it should have been.

Interestingly, in this government's very first year they managed to double the deficit to over \$12 billion. So they have long since blown through any records that our government might once have been concerned about, and of course that was long before the pandemic. Again, even there, that idea that somehow our record undermined the facts that existed previously that showed that the NDP had always had a better record of balancing budgets overall relative to the other two major political parties, even if one argued that our experience in 2015 to 2019 somewhat undercut those stats – thanks to the record of who I would argue is probably the least effective Finance minister I've ever seen in this province, the current Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, we now are back in a position where this government has the most atrocious books that this province has ever seen. It's in that context that we're considering this idea of whether we should just throw away \$4.7 billion, to begin with because we know there will be more, and what it is that we are measuring that against. What are we getting for that money, and is it the best use of the money?

10:40

I want to just talk a little bit about, you know, whether the members opposite should really be the ones that Albertans should trust to make this decision. I would argue: probably not. Again, the reason I would say, “Probably not,” is because their record to date on fiscal management is unprecedented in how bad it is. Just a week ago – well, let me back it up a bit.

If you go back to this spring – I guess that's where the story really started – this government rewrote standing orders in a way that was utterly unprecedented, used their majority in a way that was disrespectful of the parliamentary system, and jammed through a budget with about less than half the debate that the rules of this House had demanded for decades upon decades upon decades. Why would you do that? Well, clearly, they were feeling a little uncomfortable about their use of numbers and the degree to which they were confident in defending and/or adding them and things like that. Nonetheless, that's what happened. We had this spectre of this budget being jammed through, and what was interesting is that in doing that, it also, as a result, undermined the degree to which Albertans and members of this House were able to question them about their fiscal performance on the year in question, the '19-20 budget year, as well.

As it turned out, that was a really important thing because then – I can't remember if it was May or June – we saw another unprecedented display by this Finance minister, who, I would argue, is probably the worst Finance minister this province has ever seen, wherein he brought in legislation to absolve himself of the responsibility to present the annual report, otherwise known as the report card, on this government's first year of fiscal management. The legislation put in place required that report to be tabled in this House by June, but: oh, my goodness, no; we were still sitting in

June, and we didn't want to have to table that report in June, when we were still sitting and there might be more public attention to the report card on our first year's fiscal performance. So they brought in that legislation to absolve themselves of that responsibility.

At the time they claimed it was because the Auditor General had asked for that extension because the Auditor General couldn't possibly review their books in time for them to table the annual report in alignment with the legislation that governed the presentation of that annual report. A little embarrassing when the Auditor General took the opportunity to then clarify that, no, the Finance minister was not actually saying the true thing and that they had not asked for that extension, that, in fact, they were quite capable of reviewing the annual report of this government, otherwise known as their report card, on their first year in time for it to be tabled in this House in accordance with the law at the end of June.

Nonetheless – lots of drama – ultimately what happened was that at the end of August, in the deep, dark summer, when they were hoping nobody would notice, under a distracting presentation around projections for this upcoming budget, they also slid in their annual report, hoping nobody would notice. Of course, that annual report showed a number of things. Well, it showed that the economy, which in 2017 and 2018, ending March 31, 2019, a mere two weeks before this government won office, had grown and had in fact led the country in growth.

In the first year under this government's leadership what happened? The economy shrank. What else happened? Fifty thousand jobs were lost. What else happened? Here's a biggie: the deficit doubled from \$6.2 billion, which was what it had been in our last budget – interestingly, \$3 billion less than what we told Albertans it would be in the election; we actually did that thing where you underpromise and overdeliver – and then they turned around and had their budget land at over a \$12 billion deficit, the biggest deficit ever introduced in the history of the province of Alberta before the pandemic.

That's important, and the reason I go through that history is because it is this Finance minister and this government that are telling us that we should rely on his judgment to determine that, in this time of fiscal challenge, handing out \$4.7 billion is a good idea. When we're asked to support this legislation and trust the judgment of that Finance minister, it's important for us, Madam Speaker, to look at his record. That's why I'm taking a little bit of time to just sort of unpack that record just a teeny bit, because I've got to say that it's not inspiring a lot of confidence. What we're hearing from Albertans is that they would rather we not take a leap of faith and move forward on this piece of legislation because they don't trust the fiscal record of this government thus far.

The documents which have been tabled, which are written on paper in ink that you can't erase, notwithstanding the degree to which people will say whatever they want to say over there in this House these days – there's apparently a whole new rule on that issue – those documents are still documents that are owned by this House, and they're in black and white, and they say the things, and they're true.

The other thing is another document, which was tabled in this House just a week and a half or two weeks ago, the Auditor General's subsequent review of this government's first report card and their first assignment of their first year of managing our fiscal concerns. That was the Auditor General's review of all that, introduced to this House a week and a half ago. That report identified more errors and more mistakes and more failures than any Auditor General's report on the work of a Finance minister ever has in the history of this province.

You know, I just need to unpack this a bit because when the Finance minister is confronted with that in question period, he likes to say: "Oh, well, you know, when you guys were in government, you had to adjust your budget by this amount, the coal payout and the Balancing Pool payout. You had to adjust your budget there, so you had to make big adjustments just like I did." That's true, but you know what the fundamental difference is, Madam Speaker? Those adjustments were made before the budget was introduced, and those adjustments were made and were reflected in our annual report on our budget. We didn't need the Auditor General to come in and compel us to tell the truth about where this money had gone. We just did it, and we did it before we filed the budget, before we presented the budget.

In this case the Auditor General had to come in after the fact and go through and identify the multiple places where these mistakes were made. They were top mistakes. We talk about how they kind of misplaced \$1.6 billion, but, I mean, it was more than that. We saw the heartless decision of this government and this Finance minister, in order to sort of – back in the day, when they were worried about what their deficit would look like to the people of Alberta, they literally tried to reduce the size of their deficit in their first fiscal year by, I don't know, about \$200 million, maybe a bit more, changing the date on which they paid people with profound disabilities their monthly income.

Mr. Sabir: Callous.

Ms Notley: So callous.

We saw 60,000 or 70,000 Albertans not able to pay their rent on time, not able to pay their utilities, not able to buy their groceries and had their exceptionally tight and below-poverty-level budget thrown into absolute crisis so that these guys could play games with the books and try to make them look just a little bit less disastrous. So cold hearted.

10:50

Then we had this minister and the Minister of Community and Social Services sit in this House and misrepresent that that is what had happened for month after month after month after month, and it is only when the Auditor General completes his report and tables his report that we see that what we had expected all along was exactly what this Finance minister had done. It is yet another example of how this Finance minister is. His record is unmatched in terms of how bad it is so far. It is why, then, we simply can't trust his judgment that this \$4.7 billion investment in the bottom line of profitable corporations and foreign shareholders is in the best interests of Albertans.

Let's talk about other information that we might draw from to decide whether this \$4.7 billion corporate handout is a good idea. Well, there's no question that members opposite did campaign on this in the last election. I will give you this. I will say that this is probably the strongest piece of their argument for the original decision taken in June 2019: because they campaigned on it, and the people of Alberta voted for them. Among many things they can certainly argue that that was one of the things that they voted for. I mean, I didn't agree. I don't think their numbers were correct. I think that they told Albertans that things would happen which were not going to happen and which since have not happened. But there's no question that there was a thorough conversation about this issue during the election, and that's probably the strongest thing in support of it. So that's what was in support of the original announcement to take Alberta's corporate tax rate from 12 per cent down to 8 per cent over a number of years, and that's what this government proceeded to do in June 2019.

At the time they said that it would create 50,000 jobs, and they referred to their good friend and, I imagine, party member the economist from the U of C. They quote him quite commonly in saying that he projects it will be about 50,000 jobs. Honestly, the math and the background calculations for how we got to that 50,000 jobs, Madam Speaker: he's never really shown his work. It is exceptionally speculative. In fact, the longer we go from that June '19 decision, the more speculative it reveals itself to be. But what we're talking about here, of course, is not that; we're talking about taking that bad idea and accelerating it. Before we move on to the issue of the acceleration, let's just talk about that bad idea.

Here's the thing. The idea around moving the corporate tax rate and doing this massive corporate handout to these big profitable corporations at the expense of Albertans and the expense of their services was that it was going to attract all this new incremental foreign investment into Alberta that would generate economic activity, and in many cases the kind of investment that this government was seeking is not made overnight. It's the kind of investment, the kind of major, major strategic decision that is made sometimes a year, two, three years in advance. That is why, when the government announced that they would move from a 12 per cent to an 8 per cent tax rate over the course of three years, that should have gotten things moving.

That should have gotten the gears moving. That should have gotten things moving because people anticipated that this was coming. Most major corporations don't make an investment decision and move from point A to point B in a six-month cycle. You know, the bigger ones, the kinds that they claim to be trying to attract, make these decisions over 12 months, 24 months, 36 months. So it should have started with the announcement, but what did we actually see and what have we seen since June 2019 and now, November 2020?

Well, I've already talked about the 50,000 job losses before the pandemic. We've seen some of these major corporations, who have had to report to their shareholders how much this corporate handout was worth to them, and we saw hundreds of millions of dollars in different cases. In one case we saw over a billion dollars actually reported to their shareholders that they booked as a result of this corporate handout. And those same corporations over the last 18 months have done a variety of things that I'm pretty sure were not in this government's playbook: closed their headquarters and moved out of the country; took their investment and ramped down their capital investment strategies and reinvested in Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, Wisconsin; fired tens of thousands of their employees; cancelled projects. That is what these companies have done, notwithstanding that they have literally booked hundreds of millions of dollars and in some cases over a billion dollars in additional profits as a result of this \$4.7 billion corporate handout. It didn't work.

So on one hand we have the speculative musings of a very UCP sympathetic academic, and on the other hand we have the experience that Albertans have all too unfortunately been living through, particularly Albertans in Calgary. What we're seeing is that it's not working. That's important. It's important because this bill is really about taking a bad idea and supercharging it and accelerating it and making it happen faster and taking even more money out of Alberta's revenue streams at an even faster pace. Where's the evidence, Madam Speaker? Where's the evidence? We have asked repeatedly, okay?

I mean, you know, the Premier's favourite academic came out with this speculative 50,000-job plan way back before the election. He dined out on it. He campaigned on it. He's been in government now for 18 months. I know how it works. He's perfectly capable of asking Finance officials – the Finance minister is perfectly capable of asking Finance officials and asking economic development

officials to do internal work to show the actual case scenarios of how this corporate tax handout will generate new jobs. They have the ability to do that. They also have the ability to go to outside consultants, independent consultants and get their assessments.

Why would you do that, Madam Speaker? Well, I'll tell you why. We're talking about \$4.7 billion in a budget that is grossly out of whack right now, at a time when this government is attacking Albertans every single solitary day, telling them that they have too much and that they have to deal with less, and because they are doing that, they have an obligation to go to that public service and use their resources and get the additional information to justify to Albertans that this is going to work.

What we've got so far is 18 months of utter abject failure. Yet this Finance minister, who, for the reasons I have just outlined, is the worst Finance minister this province has ever seen, has not tabled those reports, has not tabled those additional independent studies about the effectiveness of this \$4.7 billion corporate handout. They haven't shown one job that they have created from it.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Albertans deserve better, and they absolutely deserve the members of this Assembly to hold that Executive Council to account and not pass this bill if there isn't some evidence that it's going to do something other than increase pressure on this government to attack Albertans on multiple other fronts.

11:00

We must have this Finance minister show us his homework, give us the evidence, show us that even though it has failed abjectly, even though it was failing and had failed to the tune of a \$12.2 billion deficit and a 50,000 job loss and major headquarters leaving this province before the pandemic, even though that is what had happened, that somehow there is now evidence to show that this is a good idea. He needs to do that.

That's where we are. Let's talk for a minute about, generally speaking, the theories around how effectively massive corporate tax cuts and handouts create jobs, and I will say this. Even those academics who suggest that there can be a benefit to the economy from cutting corporate taxes, otherwise known as \$4.7 billion corporate handouts, typically will say that it works when you are moving from being a very high taxed jurisdiction to a very low taxed jurisdiction. Here's the thing. We already were a very low taxed jurisdiction, so even though most academics will say that the benefit of this, the multiplier effect, is marginal in this situation, but what it is doing is costing us a lot of money, Mr. Speaker.

Let's talk about, then, the opportunity cost of this accelerated \$4.7 billion corporate handout. First of all, let's talk about what it is appearing to replace in terms of job creation. I think we all in this House, every single one of us, can agree on this, that we desperately want to find ways to create jobs for Albertans across this province. We all understand that Alberta families in every corner of this province are suffering as a result of the economic slowdown and the drop in the price of oil and they desperately want an economic recovery, an economic strategy, and they want decisions to be made that will help them find long-term sustainable secure jobs that will help them support their families and the future hopes and dreams of the people that they love or themselves, you know, either/or, both. We know that that's what Albertans want, and I think every single one of us here wants to see that happen, and I don't think there's any disagreement on that objective. I do believe that that is very true.

What was in place before that this corporate tax handout has replaced? Well, we had the digital tax credit. We had the capital investment tax credit. We had the investment tax credit. We had

myriad programs focused on attracting renewable energy and high tech, focused on helping us take carbon out of the barrel and supporting our energy industry in so doing by creating a more sustainable and appealing product to an international market. We had multiple processes in place.

Over that same period of time where we saw headquarters moving away and we saw 50,000 jobs lost, we also saw those kinds of companies that actually represented diversification literally doing little U-turns halfway on their way here and moving back to other provinces because some of those programs that I just listed were cut and/or eliminated. We had had a series of programs that were focused on diversification and incenting new investment in new sectors of the economy, and many of those folks turned around and went: oh, gee, the worst Finance minister that we've ever seen gave a speech to the Calgary Chamber of commerce and declared that diversification can be seen as nothing more than a long-term luxury.

And I will say this. As much as I think that all of us agree on the need for job creation, I'll also say that I think what all Albertans believe to be true – and I don't know what folks over there think anymore – is that the path to long-term job creation and the kind of economic stability that they're seeking actually demands a concerted effort to finally, after decades and decades of talking about it but not making any progress, diversify our economy.

I'm sure my colleagues have already mentioned but I would just happily mention again that, you know, in the absence of the government putting together any kind of comprehensive platform for people to engage in how we kick-start our economic recovery and renew our focus on economic diversification, our caucus is in fact doing work on that. More to the point, it's not just about caucus; it's about ensuring that we have a platform for all Albertans to participate, inviting all Albertans to be part of it, and, indeed, specifically inviting people regardless of their partisan background to be part of this important, long-overdue discussion about strategies to support strong diversification within our province. Indeed, we invite members opposite to participate in that, so if you hadn't had a chance to check it out yet, I certainly urge you to go to albertasfuture.ca and to participate in what we hope over time will become a robust conversation about the multiple ways in which we can come together to re-establish Alberta as a leader in innovation and economic development but this time through being bold diversifiers of our economy, finally doing the thing that we've talked about doing for decades and decades.

Anyway, those kinds of programs were the kinds of things that we had started working on. We took a lot of time, put a lot of thought into what we could do to diversify the economy. There were multiple other programs. We had started working on them. Most of them have been cancelled by this government and by this Finance minister, who perceives diversification to be a long-term luxury.

What are some of the other opportunity costs of the \$4.7 billion corporate handout? Well, if you're not asking companies that make billions and billions of dollars of profit in any given year – insurance company, a classic example; not the only company – if you're not asking companies that make healthy, healthy profits to pay a tax on those profits, then that means, well, first of all, that depending on the size of the company a lot of that profit leaves the province. It's not reinvested here. It's a lovely thought to imagine that it does, but many of them are certainly multiprovince, in many cases multinational companies, and there's absolutely no reason for them to reinvest here. Lots of reasons for them to reinvest in other places, and that's, of course, what many of them are doing, or they're enhancing the dividends paid to shareholders. They're doing all those kinds of things. They're not investing here.

The point is that when that happens, we lose revenue, so the government needs to find revenue in other places. This is where we get into places where we don't agree across the aisle. What we believe is that it's not fair to make regular working folks who are struggling to make ends meet, who are struggling to pay the mortgage, who are struggling to save enough money to help their kids to go to university, who are struggling to pay for maybe an extra couple of tents so that they can, you know, take their kids' friends with them when they go camping for their summer vacation, who are struggling to make a life with limited resources – we don't think that those people are the ones who should be making up this \$4.7 billion shortfall. However, the members opposite do not agree with us. They want those people to be the ones who pay more.

11:10

We have seen a gargantuan – and I could go on all night just about this, but I won't – downloading of costs to municipalities, which is pressuring property taxes across the board throughout this province, particularly in rural communities. Don't get me started on the degree to which this government takes their voters in rural Alberta for granted. They've moved beyond taking them for granted into a whole new world of targeting them. Nonetheless, even in the bigger cities you're seeing pressures for property taxes and other municipal fees to go up because of the incredible levels of downloading of costs and pressures onto municipal governments. So municipal taxes and fees are going up. Regular families are paying that.

Personal income tax. We saw the spectre of the Finance minister in his very first budget introduce a budget that ensured that income tax brackets would be indexed, which meant that everybody paid more income tax. Ironic, I guess. You know, I'm going to have to assume that the province's worst Finance minister won an argument against the Premier, who had spent at least 10 years campaigning passionately against what he called an insidious, sneaky tax, and then ultimately the world's worst Finance minister introduced that insidiously sneaky tax, and all regular Albertans are paying for it.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

School fees. Now, in that case not everybody pays that cost. It's just younger families with children that are paying that cost, but we know that cost is considerable. You have three kids, that cost can be easily \$1,000 a year now that you are spending. Why are school fees going up? We've cut funding to education.

Tuition. Why is tuition going up? Because we've slashed funding to postsecondary. I mean, we really slashed funding to postsecondary, like, over a billion dollars have come out of postsecondary because folks over there seem quite uncomfortable with the postsecondary system. I don't know what's going on. Nonetheless, that's a real target for them, so tuition is going up 21 per cent over the course of three years.

Home care fees. Seniors who need home care support are now going to have to pay more thanks to this government.

Long-term care. The cost for people to be in long-term care when you're getting the subsidized long-term care, continuing care placement, that will go up thanks to this government. Seniors will pay more.

I mean, the list is endless, actually. I could go on much longer. I will say that I think it's without question the case that any street cred, any political capital that the members opposite got by cancelling the carbon tax has long since been made up three- or fourfold by the multiple ways in which they have downloaded costs onto regular Alberta families. Profitable corporations, shareholders that reside in downtown New York: they're doing great, lots and

lots of money, billions of dollars. Our senior citizens who need low-cost or subsidized long-term care: not so much.

And then, of course, there's the provincial sales tax, where we saw the province's worst ever Finance minister muse about making a provincial sales tax something that Albertans will have to consider. After he's finished making cuts and after he's finished making them pay more, that, too, is apparently now something that is on the agenda. Of course, why not? Again, it's all about making regular people pay. Wealthy corporations pay less; regular Albertans pay more.

That's part of the places that they're looking to – oh, and park fees. Yes, I can't forget that one. To the extent that the park remains open and it's not sold, boom, those park fees are going to go up. Let's just make sure that regular families pay more at every corner.

Ms Hoffman: Trail fees.

Ms Notley: Trail fees, cross-country – oh, it's endless.

We're making Albertans pay more. Now, are they paying more for the same, at least? They're paying thousands of dollars more a year now to help counter the cost of this accelerated \$4.7 billion corporate handout. Are they at least getting the same? Well, it turns out that that's not a thing either. It turns out that we have to also slash services that regular Albertans rely on. And let's understand this, that government often provides services to Albertans who cannot otherwise afford it. So this is not an across-the-board slashing; this is a slashing of services that disproportionately impacts the people who need them the most and who can least afford to replace them.

What kinds of services, what kinds of people are in the crosshairs of this Finance minister in order to give away \$4.7 billion to profitable foreign corporations? Well, let's start with the group that is most – it's shocking to me that this Finance minister would put them in his crosshairs, children with disabilities. Children with disabilities. That is who should pay the cost of this \$4.7 billion corporate handout, that would be accelerated through this bill.

We cut PUF. The Education minister insistently claims that she hasn't. Again, thankfully, notwithstanding that apparently it's now a thing where people can get up and say things in this House and it doesn't matter that it contradicts things that have been tabled by public officials here officially in this House as part of the parliamentary tradition that has gone on for decades and decades – it is now okay for the very ministers who are responsible for those black-and-white documents to get up and claim that they say something that they don't say in black and white, and that is apparently no longer considered a breach of privilege although I think it does.

Notwithstanding the Education minister's ongoing efforts to say things that are not correct factually, the fact is that they cut PUF. They limited the number of years over which children are eligible for it. I can tell you that that program was revolutionary in Alberta, and it made such a profound difference in the lives of thousands and thousands and thousands of severely disabled four- and five-year-olds. And this minister cut it. The extra funding for speech pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, mental health therapists, who provided extra support for those kids in our schools: that program, too, eliminated.

It's striking, Madam Speaker. I just honestly don't know. And then – oh, right; that was the other thing – in the middle of the pandemic we fired 20,000 educational assistants so that those kids could be sent home and not have the support they need to continue to learn while learning online. It's just shocking to me that that is the group that is in this government's crosshairs so that they can

find a way to give away \$4.7 billion to profitable multinational corporations. So that's the first group.

Let's move along. Oh, and then, of course, they've also frozen FSCD programs, family services for children with disabilities, which means that the children with serious disabilities can no longer get access to the level of funding and programming that they once did. They've just frozen that as well. They've done that.

Let's move along. What about adults with disabilities? Well, we're very clear on that one, aren't we? Like, we really, apparently, over there have a problem with adults with disabilities. Adults with disabilities absolutely should be your go-to human beings to ask more money from. It's true; the AISH budget is over a billion dollars a year, but that's because we are a province that shares the value that we care for those who are most vulnerable among us. The members opposite say: "Well, we shouldn't be paying those greedy people with disabilities so much. They get way less in other provinces. We should give them the same amount that they get in other provinces."

11:20

Ironically, I actually predicted in the last election that this is exactly what these guys would do, that they would be looking to bring AISH into line with other provinces. They constantly refer to B.C. as a comparator. B.C.'s AISH equivalent is about \$400 a month less than what folks here on AISH get. Now these folks are talking about disqualifying a whole range of people from AISH, and if they become disqualified from AISH, do you know what they will end up getting? They will end up getting income support, not expected to work, barriers to full employment, I think it's called, BFE. You know how much that's worth? Twelve hundred dollars a month, exactly what we predicted this government would do to disabled and vulnerable Albertans in the last election. That is exactly the path that they are going down now in order to pay for their \$4.7 billion corporate handout to wealthy corporations and foreign shareholders.

It's shocking. I just don't know who makes those kinds of value decisions. Like, I just don't know how you get up in the morning and you look in the mirror and you go: no; I really want these rich people to have more money, and I'm going to make these disabled adults living on \$1,600 a month pay for it. I just don't know what that thought is.

Where else are we seeing cuts? Well, as I've said, we're seeing cuts throughout education. We know that this government decided not to fund enrolment. There was a bunch of backing and forthing between the Finance minister and the Education minister back about a year ago about whether they would or they wouldn't fund enrolment. They claim that they funded enrolment, but at the same time they then cut, I don't know, about \$300 million, \$400 million – maybe it was \$250 million – of other education funding, so, you know, it was a very dishonest conversation. At the end of the day, they did not maintain funding to keep pace with enrolment. They cut it.

Of course, many schools and school boards at that point had waited so long to find out whether they were going to get the right amount of funding or not that they basically maintained the services throughout the school year and, in many cases, exhausted their reserves. These were reserves that were designed for other things like, you know, capital improvement, maintenance improvement, those kinds of things. Anyway, they went into their reserves. We were watching this, and we knew full well that the cuts that were made, that were not honestly described to Albertans in November 2019, were actually going to come home to roost in our classrooms in September 2020. That was before COVID. Then, of course, they made a further round of cuts in the spring 2020 budget, so by

September we knew that our schools were in crisis before we asked them to bring everybody back in the face of an unprecedented pandemic.

Of course, that's what we're seeing now, and it's really, really upsetting because, you know, our kids – I mean, it sounds trite because it gets said so often, but it gets said so often because it's true. Our kids are our future. I think there are many people in this building who are parents, and I think you know what it looks like to a child if they have a year of schooling where they simply cannot get the attention of the one adult in the overcrowded room to get them to explain two or three major math concepts. Suddenly those kids are lost from math for years, perhaps indefinitely, throughout the remainder of their education. Same for reading. If you have a bad year and you can't keep up and you're falling behind, you may never catch up. What's happening with the cuts to our education system in the face of a pandemic, let alone even before that, means that there are more and more children and young adults who are going to fall behind and never catch up. Our economic future, the diversification, the future that we're all hoping to see this province have are in jeopardy because we've decided that that part of our population is part of who has to pay for this \$4.7 billion corporate handout.

Now, there's another place where we're asking people to pay, and that's, of course, health care. I won't belabour this because we talk about it in question period all the time, but in essence, you know, we've embarked upon an attack on doctors. Ironically, rural communities are feeling that the most and will feel that the most indefinitely. We are looking at reducing services in our hospitals, ironically, mostly in rural Alberta. The accessibility and availability of health care services throughout rural Alberta and in smaller communities will be reduced.

We are downloading costs of prescription drugs, that are critical drugs to keep people healthy and out of our hospitals. We've kicked 60,000 seniors off drug coverage and, you know, hope that there'll be no consequence to that. News flash: there will be.

We are threatening to fire 11,000 front-line health care workers, not to save \$600 million – just to be clear, that's another one of our worst ever Finance minister's creative massaging of the numbers, along with our Health minister, who actually led the creative massaging in that particular case. Again, your own documents said very clearly that a whole suite of changes could potentially save \$600 million; \$400 million of that was as a result of reducing nursing care and doing a whole bunch of other things to detract from our health care. Up to \$200 million might be saved by firing 10,000 front-line health care workers. Then, again, according to the documents from AHS, maybe zero will be saved, or then, again, maybe it'll cost. To be clear, the 10,000 front-line health care workers: we're not even sure we're saving any money from that one. So health care.

Postsecondary: I've already talked about postsecondary. We're cutting a billion dollars from postsecondary. You know, postsecondary is absolutely, fundamentally critical to our efforts to relaunch the economy, to engage in economic recovery, to support young Albertans as they do that work. We've taken a billion dollars out of it, and we are bound and determined to make it so expensive that it's not accessible for anybody but the most wealthy in Alberta.

Police: we've cut police funding for rural Alberta. We're asking residents of rural Alberta to pay more for their police.

Victims' services: we've reallocated victims' services such that victims have much less access to it.

Parks: we've already talked about that. We're closing parks, we're selling some off, all to make – I don't know – about \$1.9 million or something like that.

You know, the services and the support that Albertans and Alberta community members need and want, that are critical to our future in this province – in fact, there's pretty much nothing that these guys aren't going after. Our economic diversification efforts: cut significantly. I find it amusing and frustrating at the same time.

You know, we cut a billion dollars from postsecondary education, and then we have this so-called minister of economic development skipping around with the so-called minister of postsecondary education, having little press conference parties for themselves announcing: ooh, look, we're having a million dollars here, and we're giving \$1.5 million here; look at that lovely grant, \$2 million there. They seem to have completely forgotten that they took a billion dollars out of the budget just this year. I'll give you points for chutzpah. Unfortunately, I think most Albertans can see through that particular strategy. More to the point, whether they see through it or not, what we know is that our postsecondary education system is under very aggressive attack from this government. It will hurt our young people, it will hurt their quality of education, it will hurt their quality of life, it will undermine the quality of our communities, and it will fundamentally serve as a barrier to our ability to truly diversify our economy going forward, something that all Albertans, as I said before, want to see happen.

To summarize, then, we don't think that we should rely on this Finance minister as the primary validator for the fact that this is somehow a good idea because his own record is so scarred. The facts on the ground in terms of the impact of the corporate tax handout, or the corporate giveaway, are that the economy has shrunk and jobs have been lost and many, many companies have left.

11:30

The opportunity costs in terms of better, more structured, more targeted, focused ways to generate economic activity are clear because they've cut actual diversification efforts in order to fund this ineffective \$4.7 billion corporate handout. The general cost to Albertans is unfair. Asking regular Alberta families to pay and to pay and to pay and to pay and to pay, again and again and again, in so many different ways for the extra costs that this government is downloading on them is not fair because those folks can't afford it. The aggressive attack on fundamental services that Albertans rely on to keep their families safe and healthy and well educated, with a vibrant resilient future ahead of them – they're being fundamentally deconstructed by this government.

The pressure for those bad decisions to be made: that's what's being accelerated by Bill 35, not job creation, not fiscal responsibility, not economic activity, just the pressure to attack Albertans more, in different ways, more frequently, to ask for more from regular Albertans and to take more away from them. That is what this acceleration bill is accelerating, and that is why on behalf of the vast, vast, vast majority of Albertans we feel compelled to do everything we can to ensure that this incredibly misinformed, ill-advised piece of legislation not make its way successfully through this House. That's why I and all of my colleagues in our caucus will be doing everything we can to vote against it.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. So many members wishing to speak. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and leader of our party and of Her Majesty's Loyal Official Opposition for her comments and her reflections. I want to reinforce about the cuts to the most vulnerable.

The other thing that I find particularly frustrating is that when we saw this foreshadowed three years ago and we addressed it, specifically the Member for Calgary-McCall I recall talking about the potential impacts of cuts to AISH, I remember the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Premier, saying, you know: how dare the Member for Calgary-McCall? He called him by his name, and there was this big Facebook video: “How dare he accuse me of rolling back supports for the severely handicapped? It’s inappropriate for him to specifically – I think he said – prey on the vulnerable, to try to create fear that we were going to do something like take away their indexing when we, of course, voted to increase their income and to index their wages.” He was very quick to speak to his voting record on that particular issue.

Then, of course, very few months after the election that legislation was repealed, and the indexing was taken away. That’s the Premier’s actual record. I have to say that that’s one that really frustrates me. Not only was it not campaigned on; it was explicitly campaigned against. It was explicit that the now Premier was making all sorts of very personal attacks against my colleague for even questioning whether or not he would do this and said that of course he wouldn’t do it, and then, of course, he did. So I have to say that our leader’s comments made me think about that a great deal.

Then, of course, she mentioned the changes to PUF, the significant cuts to PUF, as was mentioned, specifically the cuts to the third year of PUF funding. So students who used to previously be able to get funding when they were three, four, and five only got it when they were three and four. Also, the piece around the hours being changed so significantly, too, so that for students, even with the youngest children, who would get full funding, there are far fewer of them getting the \$25,000 a year now as there were previously because of all these changes around hourly requirements.

And you want to talk red tape? That was tremendous red tape put on Alberta families. When you are a parent or somebody who has a disabled child, putting extra onus on parents to get what they are entitled to in order to be able to meet the needs of their child so that their child can be learning at grade level by kindergarten I think is the height of cruelty. The government continuing to prioritize giving \$4.7 billion away to profitable corporations that were already among the lowest taxed not just in Canada but in North America and now racing to give even more money away to these corporations I think really speaks of their priorities. I know our leader spoke of hers and of ours, and I want to thank her for that.

Could I get a time check, Madam Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: A minute and a half.

Ms Hoffman: Would the leader like to spend a minute and a half responding to some of those points that I just highlighted? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, I just want to, first of all, thank the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for those comments and also, of course, for her many, many, many years of advocacy for children in the education system and her passion for ensuring that they get the supports that they need, both when she was chair of the Edmonton public school board as well as now in her role as Education critic. Of course, during her time as Minister of Health as well she also worked tirelessly to ensure that people’s needs were met, because she believed that that was actually her job, so I want to thank her for that.

I think that you rightly identified the ways in which this government puts the needs of wealthy shareholders, from other countries in many cases, ahead of the needs of regular Alberta families. Thank you for reminding me of the profound disconnect between what the Premier said before the election and his attacks on the Member for Calgary-McCall and then his subsequent actions to go after people with disabilities. I’d forgotten that, and of course it bears repeating because it’s bad.

I move to adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: You cannot move to adjourn, but the hon. Member for Calgary-West might be able to.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I’d like to thank the members opposite for their perspective on Bill 35, but with that, I would like to adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 39

Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020

Member Irwin moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the proposed legislation will not adequately improve safety within the child care sector, and therefore further stakeholder consultation is required to address these deficiencies.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 17: Mr. Madu]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment RA1 on second reading of Bill 39. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for moving this important referral amendment. Since we’re returning to this after having debated other legislation, I’ll just take a moment to remind the House and anyone who’s watching of the specific referral amendment.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I want to start by talking about – I was going to say two, but it’s probably three – stakeholders that I feel especially need to be consulted on this bill. These three stakeholders, the child that the two had and the child who was in the care of the third, are the ones that initiated what was a court case and then what ended up being a fatality inquiry.

11:40

It was the death of this young child, Mackenzy Woolfsmith, who was only 22 months old, who had not even approached her second birthday yet. The incredibly, horrifically described death that she suffered in a care home, in a day home, led to the court case and then to the inquiry and to what I had hoped would be legislation that would achieve the intended outcomes of the inquiry.

The intended outcome, of course, of any fatality inquiry should be to reduce risk that results in the same type of fatality. When I read the words of Dan and Jen, Mackenzy’s parents, when they

were in court – now, the care provider did plead guilty in 2015, and it was a few years later, 2018, I believe, that the court case was happening around the parole for the care provider. It was February 9, 2018, that the CBC story is from. I'll be happy to send it to *Hansard* to make sure that we get the details correct. I really appreciate their thoroughness. Sometimes even when I say something that's not quite accurate, they'll be happy to make sure that it reflects the record, so I really appreciate that. So I will happily e-mail this to *Hansard* when I've completed my remarks.

I want to say the headline: Parents Show 'Dignity, Composure and Strength' in Questioning Day Home Operator who Killed Toddler. I can't imagine how difficult it must have been and how difficult it must still be every day to live life without a child who was probably your world. Everyone I know who has a child who's 22 months old spends much of their day – sleepless day, sleepless night – thinking about their child, thinking about their safety, their well-being and also thinking about their future, thinking about the contributions they'll be able to make to their community and to their family and to our society.

I think about Mackenzy's parents sitting in that courtroom, questioning the woman who had pled guilty to manslaughter resulting in the death of their daughter. The questions that they asked included these: "Is there anything we missed? . . . Was there anything we could have done differently to support you to provide care to Mackenzy?" I can't imagine how difficult it must have been for those parents sitting in that courtroom, reflecting on the horrific incident that resulted in their daughter's death. The composure that they brought to ask those questions to try to find out if there was anything they could have done to change the situation but also if there were things that could be done to change the situation for other children I think is commendable.

I think that they deserve to be consulted on this piece of legislation. I think that the woman who was the care provider, who pled guilty to manslaughter, should be consulted about this legislation. I think that the folks who were part of the inquiry should be consulted on this legislation.

The death of Mackenzy was a tragedy, and it would be also tragic if we didn't do something to prevent these types of horrific incidents from happening again. When these parents, when Jen says, "Was there anything [I] could have done differently?" bless the judge who was presiding over this case, because he very clearly at the end took a moment to make sure that her conscience was clear that it wasn't her wrongdoing that resulted in any of this, that it wasn't her fault that her child was dead. I've known a few parents whose children have died in accidents, and I know how they carry that with them for the rest of their lives.

This, Mr. Speaker, was no accident. This was manslaughter, and I know that when I'm reading through more accounts of the testimony, the person who pled guilty specifically talks about how she had had three other children in that house before who had all suffered injuries, including one who'd suffered broken bones. When Mackenzy's mom said that it would have been helpful if we would've had more information so that we could've made more decisions, and when I know this government often talks about, you know, individual responsibility, competition – choice, choosing to have less accountability and oversight doesn't support parents in being able to make the best choices for their children.

I do also feel for the woman who pled guilty. The details in this that are accounted through the autopsy and the police recounting it are horrific, and that definitely isn't the way that the care provider recounts it. So I have some concern around that. Specifically, she said that she had taken too many children into her household, and she did so for financial reasons. She knew, upon reflection, that she wasn't providing good, safe care for any of the children who were

there. She also realized that she felt isolated. She didn't feel that she had folks that she could reach out to. She had a responsibility to fulfill the commitments that she'd made to care for all of these children in what was less than safe, what ended up being incredibly dangerous, and what ended up resulting in the death of this 22-month-old child.

I think that we owe it to day home providers to properly consult with them to make sure that they don't feel isolated. I know that a lot of folks right now, especially because of the requirements around isolation, the requirements that you not engage with people who live outside of your home, the requirements that you really focus on work – and, of course, we all want to make sure that we have as many livelihoods and that the economy is as strong as possible, but there are a lot of folks who feel really isolated right now, and this woman felt isolated in 2015. She felt a burden. Well, she pled guilty in 2015. I'm not actually sure of the date of the fatality, but she felt a significant financial burden on her and her family. She felt a responsibility to those she was caring for, and she certainly had overextended herself and wasn't providing safe care, as was evident by three children prior to Mackenzy's death suffering injuries, including broken bones.

Mackenzy's injuries included swelling of the brain, bruising, and a spinal cord injury, probably a really horrific way to die, to be very frank, for a young child especially but anyone. I think those kinds of injuries at the consequence of your child care provider are something that we should take very seriously in this place. I think that consulting with the folks who were directly impacted by this should be the bare responsibility for this Assembly and for us as hon. members. I think that we should carry the obligations that were outlined in the inquiry as some of our highest moral compass in guiding our decision-making. I fear that these types of horrific incidents, this one that resulted in manslaughter – I can't even call it an accident because it resulted in manslaughter, Mr. Speaker. If we continue to fail to learn from what happened in the past, absolutely we will hold that as our responsibility. I'm not saying that anyone is justified in causing harm to a child – I want to make very clear my intention there – but I think that we have a special responsibility on behalf of the folks of this province to step up and do what we can through respecting the inquiry, acting on its recommendations, and making sure that Mackenzy's death has taught us something that results in better care for children in this province, not increasing risk; then it could be worse.

I don't believe that this care provider set out with the intention to kill somebody that was trusted in her care. I don't think anyone, probably, who provides care through a day home situation, opens it wanting to even cause mild injury in any way or allow for a mild injury to incur in their home in any way.

11:50

I know many people – all women, upon reflection – who've run excellent day home operations. Last year I was very proud to be at a child care recipient recognition event where constituents of mine but also of many of ours in this room were recognized for the care that they provide in either day home or daycare facilities.

I think that we should be working in this place to make sure that we find ways to make life safer, more affordable, and better, frankly. Make life better: I think that's been on a lot of podium art, both in the time we were in government and the time of this current government sitting. I have serious reservations that this bill in its current form will have a positive impact on children, on their families, or on those who provide care for them. I think that this is, at this point, not just disrespectful to the inquiry but it could also result in greater risk for more children, and that should be something that we all work to avoid.

I know that the government whip has very passionately spoken about child welfare and about children who've been negatively impacted and children who've been killed through neglect and in other situations as well. I share his grief, his outrage, his anger for injustice that has resulted in these types of situations. I hope that the members of this Assembly, all of us as private members or as cabinet ministers, government members, reflect on the incident that resulted in this tragic death, that resulted in this excruciating court case, that resulted in a fatality inquiry, and now here we have legislation that certainly isn't the result of what was learned through those steps. In fact, I think it is a complete contradiction.

I think what would be most becoming on this Assembly is to acknowledge the referral, send this to committee, call the impacted parties forward, and let their work continue, because as you can hear in the questions that were asked by Mackenzy's mom, her goal is to make sure that other parents don't feel the same kind of grief and sorrow that she's experienced. Her goal was to reflect on if there was anything she could have done to make sure that her daughter was still alive. It wasn't in her control, but there are parts that are in our control. I think if we want to rest well tonight or any night when we think about this case, we should think about what we've done to actually further the desire to create a better condition for all, and that includes making sure that Mackenzy's legacy results in improvements for child care, not erosion of those protections.

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

Seeing none, on amendment RA1 is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Toor: It's an honour to rise in the House today in support of Bill 39, the Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020. Our child care workers are an integral part of our economic success as well as our economic recovery, and I believe the amendments contained in this act will ensure quality child care as parents begin to head back to work after this pandemic.

The importance of child care has become exceedingly clear as we continue to navigate the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic. I think this was made most clear back in March, when centres had to close as part of our collective effort to stop the spread of COVID-19 and keep Albertans safe, because when these centres were closed, our essential workers, who have fought hard to keep Albertans safe, could not work if they were dependent on child care to do so. Luckily, our government quickly identified this gap and took action to open centres back up to help get essential workers back on the front line so that they could do what they do best while keeping children and families safe. This is also a testament to the importance of early childhood educators and their dedication to the work they do because they also put themselves on the front line, going to work every day to take care of children in what can only be described as a stressful situation.

When parents use child care, they trust that the people watching over their children will keep them safe and healthy. If parents do not have access to quality care, it is entirely likely that these parents would instead spend their day worrying about the safety and security of their children rather than focusing on their work in front of them. Honestly, who can blame them? I know that many families in Calgary-North East face this dilemma. It can be very challenging to find child care options that are flexible and meet the needs of the families. When I read through the proposed amendments in this act, I was thrilled to see changes that address challenges in child care faced by northeast residents.

If passed, the legislation will not only allow for mixed-age ratios, which was something that was implemented at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to give programs greater flexibility, something that has been massively successful and well received in the sector; more importantly, it will allow program supervisors to be included in ratios at times when it makes practical sense to do so. These two changes alone would be highly beneficial for programs and would allow child care operators to dedicate more time and resources towards other aspects involved in providing child care, which we can say is quality child care. Programs would be able to reallocate critical resources on aspects such as lesson planning and programming, which would be beneficial to programs as a whole and would foster a quality environment for children. I'm glad that Alberta's government is making changes that will reduce red tape and increase flexibility for programs. Centres can dedicate more time to the quality child care that many children receive.

Other proposed amendments that would increase flexibility and allow programs to dedicate resources elsewhere relate to the digitization of records. This is huge. Programs will no longer need to keep years' worth of paper that they will never read or access again. Just imagine how much time, space, money, and other resources will be saved by not having to keep print copies of records. They'll finally be able to make this entirely digital. This might seem a really small change, but small changes add up.

If passed, other amendments proposed in the act will modify the permitting process to make life easier on centres in buildings that are already subject to the municipal permitting process. Proposed changes will remove the requirement for these programs who complete this process twice.

If passed, other common-sense standards that will be updated in the legislation are improvements to the safety standards that centres follow to keep children safe and healthy. While it's important to reduce red tape on operators and educators, we must do so with the strongest commitment to the safety of our children.

If passed, the early learning and child care act will embed guiding principles and matters to be considered into the legislation, making quality child care standard across Alberta with robust policies and best practices. These guiding principles would set the direction for the entire act. Matters to be considered ensure that any decisions made about a child are made with his or her best interest in mind. Programs will now need to consider family background, culture, personality as well as physical and spiritual health among many other factors that influence the well-being of a child.

12:00

When making decisions about children in child care, safety is paramount, and when decisions are made with a child's best interest in mind, we meet that standard. Mr. Speaker, safety of children is paramount in both licensed and unlicensed child care facilities. That's why I'm pleased to see that proposed amendments in the Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, will improve safety standards in both licensed and unlicensed child care.

In unlicensed family day homes, programs will now be required to notify parents of stop orders whereas previously unlicensed family day homes only needed to post these updates on a bulletin board at their program, which, as we know, most parents don't have time to read. Amendments in the act would require these facilities to notify parents directly through e-mail, phone, or other means of communication that their facility has been issued a stop order. This change will increase transparency to parents because they will be better informed about decisions they are required to make about their child care. This change will better ensure safety of children in unlicensed family day homes.

If passed, amendments in this act will improve quality and safety and, again, reduce red tape for all child care in Alberta. Albertans and this government value parental choice. Parents are in the best position to make the best decisions for their children and their families, and this includes the type of child care program they desire or need in many cases.

If passed, amendments to the child care act will accomplish many great things for child care in Alberta. Most importantly, it will improve the safety and quality of child care for Albertans and their families, something we must provide as a government.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to the reasoned amendment on Bill 39, the Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020. I think that a number of my colleagues and I have raised our legitimate concerns around Bill 39 and the issues around how the bill does not address many of the concerns that have been raised by operators, by families, by parents around child care and around this bill's implementation.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note – and I know that a number of my colleagues have noted it here today and previously as we debated this bill as well – that Bill 3 is titled the Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, and it updates the name from the Child Care Licensing Act to the early learning and child care act, and that's one of the core changes that it makes.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that the name of a bill is actually quite important – right? – because it tells you what you intend to do, it sets out the standard for what you intend to accomplish, and of course we've seen this government and as well prior governments, ours included, the former NDP government included, introduce legislation with names of what they intended to convey. Whether it actually succeeds in conveying that or not is a matter of debate, I would suggest.

However, in this case the early learning and child care act, as it will be known if Bill 39 was to pass, does not mention early learning a single time in the entirety of the bill, and I think that's quite concerning. I think it's quite concerning because when we're talking about a system, our child care system is quite complex, of course. We know that my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora spoke at length about, for example, the Mackenzy Woolfsmith fatality inquiry, that made recommendations on unlicensed child care facilities and things like the number of children that should be left alone at any given time. She spoke at length about that. And we know, of course, there are licensed or accredited child care facilities in Alberta right now. We know that there are many types of different child care facilities. We know that a core piece of that and a core piece that the former NDP government had brought in was the early learning component, right? We know that early learning interventions are exceptionally successful in improving outcomes for students. The earlier you can catch developmental disabilities, the earlier you can catch even developmental delays, the more successful outcomes you will be having on the back end, right? You're talking outcomes maybe not in the short term, maybe not in the next one to two years but outcomes in the next 20 to 30 years. I think that's why it's so important.

I think that certainly, when we look at deficiencies like this in the bill, when we look at deficiencies such as this lack of actually

acknowledging that early learning is an important part of our child care plan, things like early learning, things like the fatality inquiry, things like making sure we have the proper levels of accreditation, regulation, and licensing for child care facilities – when those things aren't addressed satisfactorily in the legislation, I'm very concerned. I think that this reasoned amendment makes sense because it allows us to put the brakes on this legislation and actually go back and say: we need to talk to advocates within the child care sector, families that utilize child care, experts that have researched child care, actual child care operators, and we need to talk to all of these stakeholders and anybody else who has something of value to add. There are significant deficiencies in Bill 39, and Bill 39 will not provide the framework that we need to have a successful child care program here in Alberta.

That's why I'm concerned about Bill 39, and that's why I so wholeheartedly support this reasoned amendment, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we know that this bill simply does not address, for example, the safety concerns, right? It doesn't address any of those concerns at all. I mean, it makes for a really strange framework. We know that something – it's 2020 now, and the inquiry into the sentencing is five years old at this point. So this government, having opened the early learning and child care act or amended the early learning and child care act now: why haven't they made recommendations to that, or why haven't they made changes that would allow us to make day homes safer? Why aren't they upgrading safety requirements? Quite simply, I don't think this bill is doing enough. I don't think this bill is doing anything to actually improve the outcomes in our child care facilities.

I'm particularly concerned, Mr. Speaker, that it appears that this bill was rushed forward with a single directive, right? It seems that it was rushed forward to save paperwork. It seems, from the surface of it – if you look at the actual policy changes, if you look at the actual policy direction of this bill and how it was implemented, it looks like it was designed to take paperwork away from administrators and make it easier for operators to do whatever they want. Of course, I think that when there's unnecessary regulation, we should move to simplify it. Of course, I think that when there's unnecessary regulation and unnecessary burden on businesses and operators, we should try to relieve that burden.

In many cases it appears that one of the biggest challenges Alberta families are facing when accessing child care is affordability and safety. Those are two things that I think every family looks for when they think about putting their child in child care. I mean, of course, one of the top things you're going to look at when you first start touring a child care facility is, "Do I want to put my child in this home; do I want to put my child in this daycare?" or whatever it is. I think, obviously, off the top you're going to say: how much does this cost? Second to that, you're going to say: is this a safe environment for my child? Those are two very obvious questions that families are going to ask when they look at daycares and day homes. Mr. Speaker, this bill doesn't address either of those issues. Instead, it addresses paperwork, right? I think that's quite concerning for families.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to support my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in this reasoned amendment, and I urge all members to vote in favour of this reasoned amendment. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, is there anyone wishing to speak to amendment RA1?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

12:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 39, second reading, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or allow the minister to close.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a second time]

Bill 41

Insurance (Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care) Amendment Act, 2020

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 41 on amendment. The hon. the chief government whip does have some time remaining should he choose to use it.

Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the call. Just let me double-check the speakers list here.

Member Irwin: I might have already spoken.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, the hon. member has already spoken to the amendment.

Is there anyone else?

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at second reading of Bill 41. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate for second reading?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or have the minister close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a second time]

Bill 43

Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act

[Adjourned debate November 17: Ms Pancholi]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to join the debate.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise, certainly, after midnight here in the House to speak to a piece of legislation brought forward by the government that was a bit of a shock to most Albertans, I might say, including myself. I think that everyone in this province heard loud and clear that the government's intention during their campaign and even up to the point where they brought forward this legislation was not interested in tolling Alberta infrastructure, whether that be roads or highways or driveways or any manner of infrastructure that this legislation enables the government to place a toll upon. I was pretty disappointed to see the government embark down this road. I must say that in the minds of many Albertans who also share my disbelief that this government has decided this was a good thing to do – to the Minister of Transportation I say: the bell tolls for thee. Albertans are not onboard with tolling our infrastructure and our roadways, and I can understand why. We've seen really horrific examples of it gone sideways even in Canada.

I know that in just travelling and renting vehicles, whether it be a camper van or a car, in Europe or Australia or New Zealand, particularly in Australia, one will find a host of toll roads, but sometimes you find them after you've gone over them and you get

the bill in the mail from the camper van company that you rented a camper van from. That bill is a bit of a shock because you're not always aware, as a driver who is a guest of the country that you're driving in, bringing tourist dollars into that country and providing extra revenue for the government, that the toll roads, even with the GPS systems that we now have, do not often allow you enough time to make the decision to alter your route in time to avoid a toll. This was my experience a number of times, Mr. Speaker, and I found that indeed the transponder in my rental vehicle as a tourist in Australia had recorded my passage through a toll recording device, and I ended up with a significant bill in the mail from the camper van company that I rented from, which was a very unpleasant shock to me to receive.

A government that is intent on ensuring that the industries that we know are really having difficulties right now – particularly, I talk about the tourism industry and the hospitality industry. Tolling our roads is anathema to inviting guests to this country to spend their tourism dollars. I know that one of the things that we see on our roads in Canada regularly is rental camper vans of various types, whether it be campers or motorhomes – you can see the various different names; there are a few major name brands – and also ones that people will rent in the United States and drive north and take on a circuitous route through Canada before returning to the States. We have a thriving industry right now of individuals who, like myself, sought to rent a motorhome in another country and drive it through western Canada and perhaps down east.

One of the things that I know I did in attempting to minimize the cost was to try to avoid the toll roads that were so commonly found in Australia, in particular, yet they were not always avoidable. Even with the GPS warnings and so forth I still ended up getting tagged because I was not able to avoid the toll roads in time. It was a significant cost and a very unwelcome bill to receive after the fact, upon my return to Canada.

One aspect of this piece of legislation that I don't know if the government has truly considered is the negative effect it's going to have on our tourism economy. Mr. Speaker, an option that many folks who are renting their motorhome or camper van in the United States have is to take a slightly northern circuitous route to come up into Canada and then go back down into the States to continue their circular route in America. They may very well take the option of avoiding that little circle route, maybe up through Banff or Jasper, if they know that the roads are potentially going to be tolled. That's an element that I think that the government has to take a look at.

Now, I know that there may be some forgiveness of tolls for tourists. I know that Australia certainly does that for speeding tickets. I'm saying this for a friend: they do reduce the cost of speeding tickets that you might incur while driving a rented camper van in their country. At the very least, maybe the government will consider looking at a friendly reduction for foreign tourists or rental vehicles going through these tolls.

12:20

By and large, I'm vehemently opposed to these tolls in any case, and I believe my shock is shared by hundreds of thousands of Albertans who remember hearing this government say that they want nothing to do with tolls during the last election. It's a broken promise once again, Mr. Speaker.

It's something that I think will be a negative drag on the efforts of our tourism industry to revive given the decimating effect that the pandemic has had upon that industry, the hospitality industry. I spoke today, Mr. Speaker, with an individual who is a very, very major player in the hospitality industry in Edmonton and in Alberta, and the plight that they are in is pretty severe. One would have thought that the last thing this government would want to do at this

point in time would be to put a weight around the neck of the hospitality industry by adding something like toll roads to the cost of a vacation in Canada by somebody who might want to rent a camper van and drive across our beautiful province. It's astounding that, first of all, they would bring it in, but up close the timing of it is perfectly suited to do even greater harm to our hospitality and tourism industry, which we relied upon as one of the bright lights in the economy previous to the pandemic that we've been all struggling with over the last eight, nine months and will be struggling with for months to come.

This government has brought forward legislation that would allow for incredibly high fines, and not only that, if indeed those fines go unpaid, there's no cap on the interest that an individual might have to pay. It's an injury particularly aimed at the people on low income, the lower end of the economic spectrum. You know, individuals who can't afford the toll have been told by this government to simply go the other way, find another route. That's one of the criteria, Mr. Speaker, that the government has in this legislation suggested makes it palatable to offer tolls on certain infrastructure. There will be an alternative route, but of course the alternative route is usually, in the case of the suggestion for the toll in northern Alberta, an hour and a half to two hours' extra drive.

Of course, it's kind of like a blackmail situation, Mr. Speaker, not only in terms of its offer to drivers but also to the jurisdictions which are wanting to have infrastructure built, whether it be a roadway or increased laneways; for example, the people of the La Crête area wanting to build a bridge and, of course, the Minister of Transportation suggesting to them: "It's way, way too expensive to do that right now. It's a low-use bridge; 146,000 people a year use the bridge, and it costs too much. But tell you what. We can build that bridge for you if indeed you're willing to let it be tolled. That toll will put you at the front of the queue." Hallelujah, you get your bridge.

Guess what that's going to do to thousands of other pieces of infrastructure that many other jurisdictions would like to bring forward? Well, it's going to create a queue situation. The individual jurisdictions that want a bridge or a lane widening or another piece of infrastructure that is something they've been hoping to have for a long time: it has been necessary to their economy; they wouldn't be asking for it if indeed it was not something that was going to be beneficial to their community.

Now, of course, the precedent has been set so that these communities know that the government's cards are on the table: "If you want a piece of infrastructure, well, tell you what; we're going to take it off our provincial infrastructure books. We're going to amortize it over time with a toll that won't be seen as a drag on our provincial debt. It's going to be amortized on a separate account and not show up as a major negative on our books." You can get that bridge or that roadway by simply agreeing to allow a toll. Now, further to that, we're going to tell private businesses that they can administer this. They can contract with us, and we'll allow them to oversee the toll and collect the fees and then allow them to engage with the collection agencies."

If you are not able to pay or you decide not to pay or you dispute it or for some reason you go over a toll road and don't pay, believe me, that could end up costing you your vehicle, maybe your house, maybe your farm, maybe your business because there's no cap on interest, and the fines are huge. I mean, how many times do you have to have a \$2,500 fine inflicted upon you to have it go over an amount that is worth the value of your vehicle or your business? On top of that, the interest will compound, and then you end up potentially in court trying to save your business, your house, or your family's finances from the collection agency, who doesn't give two

hoots about the consequences. The government has handed over the responsibility and the ability to go after Albertans for these fees that they are enabling with this legislation to private corporations whose interest is solely profit.

The collection agencies will definitely be ones who are very hawkish in collecting any fees that might be owed or that they might receive judgments to collect and, on top of that, the interest as well: once again, a blatant disregard for the well-being of the Alberta population, downloading once again a devolution of responsibility, financial responsibility, from the province to individual Albertans and local users of the toll roads and also individuals who are visiting our province and bringing their dollars, their tourist dollars, to travel our province and use our roads. That is another cost that they will have to factor into their decision as to whether or not they wish to rent a camper van and travel up into Alberta or simply avoid the province with toll roads. This is a pretty slippery slope.

I know that it's a fairly common thing to find in Australia, and it wasn't a very welcome feeling to know that no matter what city you were coming into, whether it was Adelaide or Melbourne or even up in Cairns and Newcastle, Perth on the other coast, you simply had to be on your toes to watch out for toll roads that would end up charging you automatically, because of the transponder in your vehicle, dozens of dollars, hundreds of dollars if you went through them too often and weren't really watching. That'll add up in a big way, Mr. Speaker, because if you're on a trip that's taking you through a number of communities and you're going through the interchanges in a particular city, yes, you may have an option to go one way, take the shorter route, but if you're going to take the toll road, it's going to cost you more. That's what we're telling Alberta tourists: it's going to cost you more to come here, so maybe think twice.

Thank you.

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

Ms Phillips: Sure. Yes. Thanks very much to the hon. member for providing some context on a number of aspects of highway tolling and the effects that it can have on the economy and on people. I'm wondering if he could provide some insight into some areas. I know that he's been around the province a little bit, even under the more restricted circumstances of 2020, but he's been out and about quite a bit in some of our smaller cities and larger towns, places that are growing. They might be communities that are situated in or are service centres for broader agricultural communities, but they're growing. They have young populations and so on. I'm sure that the hon. member has seen areas where some of that highway infrastructure, just as a consequence of being a growing province, needs to be expanded, perhaps even areas where, through the capital plan before, it was intended that those roads be expanded, added lanes or adding capacity to bridges, that sort of thing.

12:30

I'm wondering if the hon. member can talk a little bit about what he sees might be the effect on some of our larger towns, our smaller cities that are major trade corridors, places where there is a lot of heavier truck traffic, where we need to add a lane or two to keep the economy moving, and places where it would be really harmful to the community to have to pay to get in and out of town every single time.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member for Lethbridge-West, for bringing up the opportunity for me to expand a little bit on some of the concerns that communities may have if they do indeed opt for the government's enabling legislation to get something built for their community by allowing a toll. I know that the legislation kind of puts them behind the eight ball, and it may feel a little bit like blackmail. Then once they do end up going ahead and accepting a toll situation to go to the front of the queue, they end up realizing maybe afterwards that the cost to the businesses in their local community, whether they be the tow truck driver, the dump truck driver, or farmers in the local area, is an injurious cost, especially if you end up with fines for nonpayment, whether advertent or inadvertent. You have people, I think rightfully, angry at being forced to say: okay; do I engage and take this toll road, or do I go the extra hour or so around it?

I know that in my own constituency of Edmonton-McClung, Mr. Speaker, there's currently a project under way that we initiated while we were in government to widen the section of the Edmonton southwest leg of the Henday, from Calgary Trail all the way up to Stony Plain Road, because of traffic congestion. This government, to their credit, have continued that. It's a good infrastructure project that's ongoing right now, but it's a project that would be perhaps deemed as new under this legislation and perhaps eligible to be tolled. For something that we expected as taxpayers that would be a part of the provincial budget, the jury's out under the regulations and definitions as to whether or not something that might be under way but incomplete could end up being shifted into the category of a toll piece of infrastructure. We certainly watch out for that.

I mean, there's some discussion about the Deerfoot in Calgary, extra lanes being added to the ring road there, and perhaps that would end up being a piece of toll infrastructure. Those are large communities. But the small communities, Mr. Speaker, are really going to be left with no choice in terms of getting their infrastructure built. If they want any hope of getting a bridge built or lanes widened, they're going to see the queue jumpers right there, and that's how you do it. You just agree to a toll. I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker. That's not a system that most Albertans see as fair, and they didn't vote for it. They wonder why they're bringing it in.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone else wishing to join the debate this evening? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak on the topic of Bill 43, Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act, which, of course, lays out the legislative plan for ability to charge a toll on new and expanded highway infrastructure. In this act "'expanded highway infrastructure' means highway infrastructure that is reconfigured to increase capacity, including by adding lanes or strengthening or widening a bridge." In addition, the act essentially lays out that if a person can move on it with wheels, if there is expanded highway infrastructure, or if it is a new development, then the government can toll it. Now, this allows for every new lane, bridge, alleyway, even new private driveways in definitions in the act to be a potential place where a toll could be applied.

Let me talk here a little bit, Mr. Speaker, about the sad tale of the highway 3 bridge that goes over the Oldman River. It is the main thoroughfare through Lethbridge and the way that most people get into town and out. In 2019 the New Democrats, after ensuring that highway 3 was properly refurbished for the next 10-year planning period, committed the funds to expand both the capacity and the safety of the highway 3 bridge and that particular section of highway over the river. It was a \$100 million commitment that was made by our government in no small part because of the advocacy

of the former MLA for Lethbridge-East. She ensured that that project was at the forefront of our government's agenda, and she made sure that we got the funding in place for that. She picked up that project, she ran with it, and she took it over the line.

Now, that announcement was made on March 20. The then leader of the UCP visited the city, and he made the following pledge. It is written down in the media: to "keep infrastructure funding in place, including the \$100 million pledged" to replace highway 3 with a six-lane bridge. Those were the words on March 20, 2019, from the then UCP leader, now the Premier. On July 26, 2019, we then get a bit of a backpedalling: we will probably honour the commitments, but we're all under review, et cetera. By August: the same message.

The mayor of Lethbridge comes out, and he says: "Look, this is a main trade route. We need one more lane each way. It is a matter of safety and capacity. This is a very high priority for the city." In particular, he said that it was a high priority because of safety and capacity by adding a lane and ensuring that we've got strengthening and widening of that bridge. November 2019: some highway 3 funding rolls around. Nothing for Lethbridge. July 2020: same thing. Another round of the government announcement; nothing for Lethbridge.

Now we know why, Mr. Speaker. Now we know why because it is very clear that unless the people of Lethbridge stand up and say, "You will not toll our main thoroughfare through our city," that that is the only way that this government is going to fund that critical piece of infrastructure. It is very clear to me that that is the plan for this commitment, that the people of Lethbridge will pay every single time they have to run out to Coalhurst for an errand. The people of Lethbridge will pay if Whoop-Up is backed up, and you have to go around in the wintertime. The people of Lethbridge will pay every single time. The agricultural producers will pay, the recreationalists will pay, the folks who live on the outskirts of town will pay every single time they cross the river, at least if we allow this bill to pass in its current form. That is not only a very real possibility but it explains why we have seen such foot-dragging on a commitment that on March 20, 2019, the now Premier promised would move forward, and it hasn't.

12:40

Mr. Speaker, I can understand that the members opposite have heard from the community of La Crête on the topic of the river crossing. I can understand that they've heard from Mackenzie county. I, too, have heard from Mackenzie county, and I can understand the types of trade-offs and the conclusions that they reached for that particular piece of infrastructure. What I cannot understand is why, then, that would be taken as a permission structure to then toll every new lane, bridge, alley, even down to new private driveways, and in particular why they would give themselves the right to toll expanded highway infrastructure reconfigured to increase capacity, including by adding lanes or strengthening or widening a bridge.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Was that your private driveway? Was that the one to the cabin?

Ms Phillips: Now, I can understand that the hon. members opposite are not happy that, you know, we read the legislation. I can understand that there's a little bit of chirping coming from across the way, but that's the reality for the people of Lethbridge, that they will pay. They won't just pay in higher property taxes, they won't just pay in new fees, they won't just pay expanded personal income taxes, they won't just pay in the form of a number of new parks user fees, for example, or the privatization of Park Lake or the outright

disestablishment of it potentially, but they also will – if it doesn't get a contract, it could be – pay, Mr. Speaker . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Kind of like your road to your cabin, Shannon, the one you would pave?

Ms Phillips: I was just called by my first name, Mr. Speaker. That's a thing that just happened.

They will also pay for these newly tolled roads. Nobody voted for that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jason Nixon: The road to the cabin, Member for Lethbridge-West?

Ms Phillips: In fact, the people who did vote UCP voted for the following commitment: to "keep infrastructure funding in place, including the \$100 million" pledged by the NDP to replace highway 3 with a six-lane bridge.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Did you pave it? It's a fair question.

Ms Phillips: That's what they voted for if they voted UCP, Mr. Speaker, not for new tolls on their roads.

With that, I will conclude my comments, and the hon. member across the way, including the Government House Leader, can conclude his chirping at me. Thank you.

Mr. Jason Nixon: No, I'm not getting up. I want to know if you paved it.

The Speaker: Order.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment.

Mr. Jason Nixon: You can stand up and ask the question.

Ms Sweet: You've only got 10 minutes to hold it together. You can do it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I just want to know if she paved the road. It's a fair question.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this evening, morning, depending on how one considers it? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. It's my pleasure to join debate at this point in time and to talk about Bill 43. You know, I think it was yesterday that the Minister of Transportation was talking about Bill 43. I took notes and listened. While he was saying that this was something that should be supported, I don't agree myself.

With regard to the legislation, he described it as enabling legislation, and I think that's a problem because it opens a door, obviously, for toll roads throughout Alberta. I don't think that's something that Albertans want necessarily. They don't want toll roads throughout their province. They didn't vote for toll roads throughout their province. Instead of having specific legislation – and I think the Minister of Transportation said: well, we don't want specific legislation because, really, that would create too much red tape when we have to come back with another project to put before this Legislature. You know, I think Albertans would appreciate the knowledge that La Crête's bridge is the only one that will happen under specific legislation. But enabling legislation, as I said, opens a door, and the argument that, you know, it saves red tape is really just spurious, I think.

Other things we heard were with regard to the tolling – and it's in the bill – of new infrastructure throughout the province, not existing infrastructure. As my colleague from Lethbridge-West talked about, if there are additions, if there's strengthening of bridges, if there are other things like that, then that would be the subject of tolling. I myself don't remember that being campaigned on. I do remember the campaign. I do remember many things being said by the then leader of the party over there, but I don't remember toll roads throughout Alberta being campaigned on. When we said that that's likely what the UCP will be doing, we were told that we were fearing and smearing the UCP and that we should just stop.

This fast and loose approach, this fast and loose act, is one that I think is, unfortunately, not in the best interests of Albertans. You know, it was a promise made to not toll, and it's obviously a promise not kept, a promise broken. Saying one thing to get elected and then another thing when you come into the House, in the actions of the Minister of Transportation, is unfortunate.

The Minister of Transportation talked about how this would invest monies across Alberta through the introduction of tolls. There would be a payback over time, and once enough monies were collected to pay off that additional piece of infrastructure, the toll would be stopped. I really wonder if we're going to see that day, Mr. Speaker, or if the tolls will just become a way, after the infrastructure is paid off, to repair the fiscal damage that the UCP is bringing upon this province with their \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway and other things that were identified so well by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition earlier tonight.

You know, I do think, though, that we do need to invest across this province, and I'm glad there's a \$10 billion investment in capital across this province. I think that helps Albertans out, helps out the companies that Albertans work for, and I just want to remind members on the opposite side that when we became government, we increased the previous capital plan, of Premier Prentice at that time, by 15 per cent and eventually got it up to \$8 billion. As I just mentioned, that was beneficial to Albertans and their companies.

The other thing that concerns me – and I think it was brought up by my colleague to my right, behind me – is that roads like the Deerfoot Trail likely will be the subject of additional lanes, and the only way that you can use those additional lanes, if they come under this bill, will be as a result of getting a transponder in your car and paying a toll each and every time you drive up and down that part of the highway within the city of Calgary.

You know, it is unfortunate at this point in time that it's gridlocked at least two times a day, and it is a huge discomfort for the people who need to use that access back and forth to their work and their place of residence. They won't thank anybody for being able to use the toll road and to pay likely hundreds of dollars a year as a result of using a transponder. It's used on the 407 in Toronto, and I know that those costs build up over time. You do save time and money when you're not stuck in traffic, but the cost benefit is something that all people need to look at. If you're in Calgary and you're using the Deerfoot Trail, you are at this point in time wishing for an additional lane. It's been long talked about. The city has plans for it, and it will be very expensive for people who use a toll like that in the future.

What does the toll do? Well, it helps this government because of the complete mess they've made with finances. The users will be paying for the privilege of using public roadways, for the most part.

12:50

One other thing that the Minister of Transportation talked about is that there will always be a nontoll alternative. But, really, who's going to decide on the appropriateness of that nontoll alternative, and how far out of the way will it be for people to take that nontoll

alternative to be not paying for tolls? That's something that's not sorted out in this bill. It is identified in the preamble of this bill, but there are no criteria. Really, we're buying something here in Bill 43 where we don't have a clear indication of what it's really going to cost people who continue to use nontoll alternatives.

Mr. Speaker, the fast and loose act that's before us here is something, as I said, that wasn't campaigned on, is brought forward now, and is just a way for this government to offset the costs of infrastructure that they have really hooped themselves around because of the fact that they've given away \$4.7 billion. They have downloaded costs on to Albertans in all sorts of other ways, and now Albertans will be subject to an additional cost because of this UCP government. I won't be supporting it, and my colleagues won't be either.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to everybody for their hard work today. I would like to move to adjourn the Assembly until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:53 a.m. on Thursday]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 48	Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2)	3247
Bill 41	Insurance (Enhancing Driver Affordability and Care) Amendment Act, 2020	3255, 3276
Bill 35	Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020.....	3265
Bill 39	Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020	3272
Bill 43	Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act	3276

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