



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 24, 2020

Day 70

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UCP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Hon. Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
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Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UCP)
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Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UCP),
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UCP),
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Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 24, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has a statement to make.

COVID-19 Related Decision-making and Mental Health

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to you today not as an MLA but about a role I have that I know that you can relate to, that of a parent, something that reflects my reality and the reality of people I hear from across the province daily, a parent in COVID times.

In normal times raising a family is not easy; worth it, but not easy. However, the COVID pandemic has taken the responsibility of that role and changed it in ways many of us could never imagine. As I'm sure you do, I worry about my kids, but in COVID I worry about everything they do.

I worry about school. Did I make the right choice? Should I have opted for online? What about his mental health? Does sending him to school make it better or worse when he really can't socialize with the students? What is the cohort if he plays a team sport? What impact does that have on our family?

I worry about them as they head off to their jobs. Did they remember their mask? Are they washing or sanitizing their hands enough? What about if they come into contact with someone not wearing a mask? Should they quit? What about their mental health?

I worry about their experience or lack thereof in university. Will they get what they need out of online learning? Will they be prepared? How do I help them make this a positive experience when they are alone every single day? What about their mental health?

Mr. Speaker, I live in a multigenerational household with my mother as well, so I worry every single time one of us leaves and enters the house. Should we all do everything online? What if we bring something home to her? Should we separate ourselves from her? What about her mental health? Can I hug her? If I do, will she be here next year? Am I doing enough?

Mr. Speaker, is this UCP government really doing enough?

Legacy of Former MLA Manmeet Singh Bhullar

Mr. Toor: Mr. Speaker, yesterday was the anniversary of Manmeet Bhullar's untimely passing five years ago. Many members of this House knew him well and served with him. We all knew his supreme dedication to the public service. Tragically, it was this selfless motivation of stopping on the side of the highway in a snowstorm to help a motorist in need that led to the sad events of that fateful day.

Manmeet was the first turbaned Sikh cabinet minister to serve as an MLA in this province. Manmeet was a tireless worker who never wavered in his determination to advance the cause of the northeast community to his caucus and his cabinet colleagues. I'm so proud that my constituency of Calgary-Falconridge contains several communities that Manmeet represented. As a son of our northeast community, there have been many fine tributes that followed after his passing such as the naming of a school in his honour, also the naming of a park which has become a favourite meeting place for many northeast residents to come together to talk and enjoy the outdoors.

His legacy will always be measured by his sacrifice and his dedication to public service. In this month of November, when we all remember the supreme sacrifices of so many men and women who gave their lives for our freedoms, we have another life to be thankful for. In today's challenging world, where we are fighting the COVID-19 virus, which will require dedication, commitment, and compassion of others to overcome and defeat, we remember a shining example of selflessness.

Manmeet will never be forgotten and will be remembered for the leader he was. Thank you.

Holodomor Memorial Day

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, today we are commemorating Holodomor Memorial Day here in the Legislature. The ceremony was beautiful but for remembering a terrible genocide. From 1932 to '33 the tyrannical Communist regime of the Soviet Union, led by Joseph Stalin, instigated a deliberate mass starvation of the Ukrainian people. Soviet forces removed all food from the country, and Ukraine's borders were sealed for two years in one of the most horrific acts of genocide this world has ever seen. It is estimated that approximately 10 million people died. Families and entire communities were decimated.

When I think of Holodomor, I remember the meaning behind the words "holod," meaning hunger, and "moryty," for slow, cruel death. I think of all the poor Ukrainians who suffered this slow, cruel death by hunger. On this somber day let us join with Ukrainians in Alberta and around the world in remembering the victims of this genocide and mourn with the families that lost so many loved ones. Let us remember the tremendous courage and resolve of the Ukrainians which survived that painful period and shared their terrifying experiences.

I am so fortunate to be part of the wonderful Ukrainian community in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, which is home to the largest Ukrainian community in Canada. I'm also so proud to be a descendant of one of the first Ukrainian settlers to Canada, Ivan Pylypow, which I share my Ukrainian heritage with. Our people have had an incredible, rich history, and today we stand with our Ukrainian neighbours to acknowledge the disgusting and evil acts of the genocide committed by the Soviet Union, and we give thanks for living in Alberta, where we have the freedom to mourn, freedom to acknowledge historical injustices, and freedom to claim our heritage. Our province has been made richer by many of the people of Ukrainian origin who found a new life here in Alberta and who form such a vital part of our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

COVID-19 Related Personal Experiences

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I received a powerful e-mail from a constituent devastated by this government's inaction on COVID-19. Quote:

It's 4:00 a.m. and I'm awake listening to every breath my 24 year old daughter takes in her basement bedroom . . . waiting and wondering if her breathing pattern will change . . .

My daughter is a first year teacher who chose to teach online this year . . . She has been vigilant each and every day throughout this pandemic – masking, social distancing, maintaining the recommended bubble size, foregoing social events . . .

This past Friday, however, my daughter came home and sadly reported that her colleague had fallen ill and then she swiftly went to the basement [for] her isolation. . . . Four hours [later] my daughter was FaceTiming me from the basement crying in pain. Her head was violently throbbing, her eyes burning from fever, her muscles and joints aching. The dreaded

cough would start . . . one hour later – in exactly five hours from the time she arrived home my healthy, beautiful daughter was multi symptomatic for COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, her daughter later tested positive, but this is not the first time this family has been touched by the pandemic. The first time was when COVID crept into her mother's long-term care facility. Quote:

I always thought when my mother grew old and infirm that I would have the opportunity to ease her suffering by the touch of my hand but she has been denied that . . . comfort. It is heartbreaking for both of us.

In these most stressful life moments, my husband and I would normally lean heavily on each other . . . This time is different though. My husband is a physician and he would not be able to work if he had contact with my daughter so he has reluctantly separated from us . . . So at 4 a.m. my husband is alone, my daughter is alone and I am alone. I can't help but thinking as I lie awake that this moment would be easier if I knew that everyone was doing their very best to fight this wicked virus . . . if I knew our government was committed to crushing this virus but I know that that isn't the case.

Over the past months I have witnessed this UCP government undermine our healthcare professionals at an alarming rate and in doing so jeopardize the health and well being of [all Albertans.] My son once said to me when I was sick, "Don't worry Mom I've got you." If a 19 year old boy can say that to his mom and mean it, is it too much to expect our government to offer the same reassurance to the people of this province in what is proving to be a dark hour?

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

Official Opposition Remarks

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in this House to take a stand against misinformation. I take a stand in support of the truth. I must say that in the short time I've spent in this Legislature, it has shocked me how little regard the NDP have for the truth and how comfortable they are to lie and to defame, protected by the privilege of this House. For the NDP it seems that facts don't matter, and frankly that is sad.

One of the most glaring attacks on the truth from the NDP recently has been their characterization of a recent report from the Auditor General. Mr. Speaker, just this morning the NDP posted on their Facebook site that, quote, the UCP lost \$1.6 billion. They posted this as a prompt to watch the Auditor General's appearance before the Public Accounts Committee this morning. I was at that committee this morning, and I personally asked the Auditor General about this NDP claim about so-called lost money. I can tell the House what the Auditor General said, and I quote: there is no missing money. That's it. That's the truth.

1:40

And the NDP? It confirms that their propensity is to lie and to mislead. Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General isn't partisan. He's an independent officer of this Legislature, and he is concerned about the numbers and the facts, and quite frankly the fact is that the NDP have a hard time telling the truth.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I expect that the NDP may start to quibble and backtrack and that they may try to explain their way out of their lies, but thankfully the Auditor General was clear. Just as it was stated in his report and confirmed again today, his office was able to issue a, quote, unqualified and clean audit. He confirmed to me and members of the committee that the process of the audit and the adjustments made is a normal and regular one.

His office also confirmed that this year we faced some unique and unprecedented challenges when it came to the impacts of

COVID-19, confirming that there was significant volatility that would impact the modelling.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the NDP were listening this morning because this morning we saw the truth come through, and we saw the lies of the NDP crumble before them.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order is noted.

Holodomor Memorial Day

Mr. Bilous: On the fourth Saturday of November each year we pause to reflect and remember the loss of life from Holodomor. The Ukrainian people were subjects of an organized famine by the Soviet Union, a concerted effort to eradicate a culture through mass starvation. Make no mistake: the Holodomor was an undeniable act of genocide, an unforgivable crime against humanity. The word "Holodomor" comes from the Ukrainian words for hunger and death, an evocative word for extermination by starvation the Ukrainian people endured in 1932 to '33. Millions of men, women, and children died.

Alberta is the proud home of nearly 400,000 people of Ukrainian ancestry, and I am proud to be amongst them. Many Ukrainian Albertans have family connections to the atrocities committed during the famine. Our community is still healing from the wounds suffered in 1932.

It's important for us to reflect on the impact of the cumulative acts and omissions of a government on people's lives. Millions were killed from a series of dreadful decisions, negligent inaction, and malicious sabotage. Let us never forget this truth; 1933 is not that long ago. Survivors of Holodomor are still alive today. We cannot allow the memories of the Holodomor to die with them. We cannot stand by idly and watch history repeat itself.

But from darkness hope can emerge. We understand that the past cannot be changed, and while we cannot right these wrongs done to our ancestors, we can use this tragedy as a reminder that from the depths of despair the spirit of the Ukrainian people was not broken. It continues to exist in the millions of Ukrainians across the world and the 365,000 here in Alberta. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

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

National Housing Day

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize National Housing Day, which was on Sunday, November 22. National Housing Day is an opportunity for us to recognize our outstanding partners who provide affordable housing for Albertans in need. This includes the many housing management bodies, civil society groups, and private companies who deliver programs, build homes, and maintain units. This year has been more challenging than most. To our housing partners, we are thankful for your ongoing commitment to affordable housing, and we appreciate your amazing response during this pandemic.

National Housing Day is also an opportunity to raise awareness of challenges facing affordable housing and explore potential solutions. Demand for affordable housing exceeds our current capacity. More than 110,000 Albertans live in affordable housing. More than 19,000 are on wait-lists, and nearly half a million Albertans spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing, which is the maximum threshold for affordability.

If the system does not change, Mr. Speaker, the gap between available housing and those who need it will continue to grow. This

is why the hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing appointed the Affordable Housing Review Panel in July. I was honoured to chair that panel. Along with the expert panel members I spent months immersed in the province's affordable housing system, hearing from almost 160 Albertans through engagement sessions, reviewing more than 120 written submissions, and analyzing countless pages of research and data. That work culminated in the panel's final report, which includes recommendations intended to help the Alberta government identify more efficient, effective, and sustainable approaches to affordable housing. I know the minister has plans to share that report with Albertans once she has thoroughly reviewed it.

Thank you, and happy National Housing Day.

Police Funding

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, earlier this month Calgary city council voted to defund the police to the tune of \$20 million, and there couldn't be a worse time to slash their budget as crime is on the rise. To add to the concern, my constituents and I live right next door, and this short-sighted move will affect all surrounding areas, including my riding. Our government has moved to increase the number of RCMP across the province, and due to council's cut, their job just became more challenging. Urban crime very often seeps into suburban areas, and RCMP detachments are greatly aided by the complementary work the city police provide. Now the Calgary Police Service will have less funds, less resources, and fewer staff. Calgary city council's ideologically driven agenda means that 56 recruits are now on the chopping block and will lose their jobs to meet this new budget. For the members opposite, this is what a real cut and a real attack on front-line workers looks like.

Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Justice and Solicitor General began the hard work of police reform to address the concerns brought to the forefront in our society. Ending the practice of carding while reinforcing street checks is the very symbol of that undertaking. Law enforcement has been calling for the prohibition of carding, and the left, during their term, ignored them. Then when it became politically advantageous, they offered them as a sacrifice to subdue defund-the-police radicals.

Our police services, brave men and women, do an often thankless job serving our communities, keeping us safe while putting their lives on the line every day. COVID-19 has added an extra layer of risk, and more than ever they need our support and respect, not some ridiculous virtue signalling that only leads to reduced services in our communities, which will jeopardize citizens and the safety of those who protect and serve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

La Crête Bridge Proposal

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is exactly 739 kilometres from the constituency office in Edmonton-Strathcona to Tompkins Landing in my constituency, 996 kilometres from the Calgary-Buffalo constituency office, and 1,234 kilometres from the constituency office in Lethbridge-West. For context, you could drive from this Legislature and get to Wyoming sooner than the Member for Lethbridge-West could get to Tompkins Landing. I highly encourage the Member for Lethbridge-West to come up to my riding. Upon arrival at Tompkins Landing she would find the mighty Peace River, spanning nearly a kilometre wide, one of the largest rivers by volume and by span in our beautiful province.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents have written, begged, and pleaded with this government to please build a bridge where there is a ferry

at Tompkins Landing, and the members opposite seem intent on trying to stop my constituents and telling them that they're wrong. It's very interesting. Apparently, my constituents don't want a bridge there. Apparently, they don't want to pay for it. Why else would the members opposite be opposing the bill that would allow that with user-fee services, to get that bridge built, where there is no other way to get across the Peace River? Apparently, members who live in Edmonton or Calgary or Lethbridge know better than my own constituents. We've been told that we don't want the bridge, that we're wrong. Apparently, we don't want it, and we don't want to pay for it ourselves either. Apparently, the NDP has got it from here. They'll move forward. They've taken care of it. Might as well stop cutting trees, drilling wells, and driving trucks while we're at it.

The primary role of any elected official on any side of the House is to listen to Albertans and our constituents. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that that's exactly what I'm doing for those who live in the most rural and northern communities in the province. We've spoken loud and clear. We're not children to be managed. This is not a game. This is not a television show on History Channel. The truth is that many of our constituents have to cross a bridge made out of ice to commute, to get to work.

Mr. Speaker, I beg you, please vote for this bill.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Response

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twelve thousand more cases; 88 more hospitalizations; 78 more deaths. It's been 11 days since Albertans have heard directly from their Premier. The virus is out of control, and our health system is on the edge. Right now we're averaging a new case every single minute. More people are getting sick, and the Premier couldn't find the camera function on Zoom. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans feel scared, frustrated, and betrayed. To the Deputy Premier. Albertans are in the grip of a devastating second wave. Why has the Premier abandoned them?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's a ridiculous comment by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The Premier has not abandoned anybody. He's working, was working in self-isolation. The member knows that. He was following a requirement to self-isolate, just like we want all Albertans to do when they find themselves potentially exposed to COVID. We're happy that the Premier is well. He's back at work, and he will be in the press conference today at 4:30 to discuss COVID-19 and the direction that our province is taking. Again, this side of the House is focused on lives and livelihoods, unlike the NDP, who continue to fearmonger and bet against Alberta. We're going to work with Albertans, and we're going to get through this.

The Speaker: I'll just provide some caution around mentioning – I understand that it may be difficult – the presence or the absence of any member for any reason.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the Premier found time to Zoom his UCP members over the weekend; he should have found time to do the same to Albertans. Quote: this is like a snowball rolling down a hill, growing bigger and faster. That's our CMO, and she's right. And it was the Premier's inaction that got us here. The strictest of measures even today will not slow the spike in hospitalizations for weeks. The fact is that our per capita cases

have practically been leading the country, second only to Manitoba, for almost a month now. Science told you to act. Best practices from other jurisdictions told you to act. Doctors begged you to act. Why didn't you?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, for that member to lecture anybody on being available to Albertans is ridiculous. The entire time that she was the Premier, she barely left the city of Edmonton and certainly didn't come and consult with your constituents or mine on many issues. The Premier of Alberta travels widely; they criticize him for that. He goes into isolation; they criticize him for that. The reality is that the Premier is communicating with Albertans on a daily basis. The Priorities Implementation Cabinet Committee met yesterday and are bringing forward new measures, which you will hear about at 4:30 in the press conference with the Premier.

Ms Notley: The biggest crisis to hit this province in more than one generation; radio silence, 11 days. Doctors, economists, and small-business owners all told the Premier that we needed more action; instead, he waited, he went into hiding, and now he's pushing us closer to a holiday lockdown, yet the only supports for small businesses are inadequate programs that generate automatic rejection letters. Now, the IMF has said: any economic recovery depends on resolving the health crisis. It is not a trade-off, and it never has been. Why won't the Premier or his Deputy Premier admit that this rhetoric pitting the economy against the health of Albertans has actually failed both?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 12 the government announced new restrictions. We continue to manage the COVID-19 situation in real time. We are committed to protecting lives and livelihoods, unlike the NDP, who have been screaming for full shutdowns and not wanting to recognize the economic impact of that to Albertans. Instead, this government throughout the entire COVID-19 situation has been taking reasonable measures along the way to be able to bend the curve and help Albertans to keep safe. We trust Albertans. We are going to work side by side with Albertans, and we're going to get through this, and we will not bet against them like the NDP keep betting against them.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

COVID-19 Statistics and Health System Capacity

Ms Notley: Here is what happens when you pit the economy against the health of Albertans. Not only does the economy suffer, but the health system starts to collapse. Mr. Speaker, there are Albertans occupying 62 of our 70 ICU beds set aside for COVID. We know that in Edmonton they've already far exceeded that capacity, and this means that care for all ICU patients is being diminished, and the situation is getting worse. We've all seen the photo of Calgary ICU Dr. Simon Demers-Marcil on his knees calling the family of a patient he lost to COVID. Why did this Premier and his government fail to protect the health all Albertans depend on?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, the Leader of the Opposition is being utterly ridiculous with her question. Focusing on fear and smear and trying to scare Albertans is not the way forward on this; instead, this government is going to continue to work side by side with Albertans bringing forward reasonable measures to be able to bend the curve and get our province through this. We've done very

well as a province. We'll continue to make adjustments as we need to to make sure that Alberta gets through this situation. What we will not do is become the party, like the NDP, of fear and smear; instead, we'll focus, again, on working with Albertans and getting Alberta through this pandemic.

Ms Notley: Well, one of the people this government is allegedly working side by side with is Dr. Darren Markland, an ICU physician, who says that without action they will be overwhelmed by mid-December. That's when, quote, some patients become put aside for other patients that have more benefit; that's triage. End quote. Put another way, triage means that doctors don't treat Albertans based on who's in need. They treat based on whose need is greatest. At this rate, doctors will be asked to pick and choose, and some Albertans simply won't get the help they need. The Premier knew this was coming. How could he possibly make the decision to let it happen?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier did not cause COVID-19. COVID-19 is a situation that is facing the entire globe. Alberta, just like any other government, is focused on managing that situation. We will continue to take actions to protect both lives and livelihoods. The Premier will have more to say about those actions with the Health minister and Dr. Hinshaw at 4:30 today. Again, our government will continue to be focused on protecting lives and livelihoods, and it's important that the Official Opposition stops playing the fearmongering games and gets in the boat and helps us to get Alberta back on track.

Ms Notley: The Premier was elected to lead through hard times, not to hide. Quote: we continue to break daily records of new numbers of cases, and our ICU beds are nearly full. Quote: the pandemic has begun a slow collapse of our health care system, and time is running out to reverse it. Quote: health care workers are a finite resource; we cannot continue providing adequate care at this pace. Mr. Speaker, all of this is from the third letter sent to this Premier from hundreds of front-line physicians begging him to protect the health and safety of all Albertans. Why won't he listen to them?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the government are listening. On November 12 we brought in new restrictions to be able to help with the new reality that we're facing with COVID-19 inside this province. As I said, the PIC met again yesterday to re-evaluate those options. The Premier will have more to say on the direction of the province when it comes to this important issue at 4:30, but this government will, again, continue to focus on protecting lives and livelihoods. I would encourage the Leader of the Official Opposition to stay tuned for 4:30 this afternoon.

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

Government Members' Remarks on COVID-19

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only thing this Premier has done is preach personal responsibility, but at the same time his own caucus has shown none. As representatives of the government they have an obligation to lead by example, and their failure is this whole government's failure. This weekend the Member for Banff-Kananaskis sent a message to Albertans saying, quote, the worst of COVID-19 is behind us. This kind of misinformation from someone elected to lead is dangerous and irresponsible. To the Deputy Premier: will you at least direct that member to apologize to Albertans, or is it that you believe the worst is behind us?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, playing politics with the death of Albertans is the lowest form of politics. It's unfortunate to see the NDP continue to do that. Again, this government is focused on protecting lives and livelihoods. The Premier and the Health minister will have more to say on the direction that we are headed as a province on COVID-19 at 4:30. We brought in new restrictions on November 12, and we will continue to bring forward plans that help, again, to protect lives and to protect livelihoods. We will not bet against Albertans, and we will get through this together.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the only thing this government has done is lecture Albertans on personal responsibility, but there's more. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland told Albertans, with their new right-wing language, that wearing a mask to protect yourself is virtue signalling. He then suggested that Albertans wearing masks are the ones driving the spread. Every time the Premier lets these kinds of antiscience, artifact comments from his caucus go unchecked, it legitimizes misinformation. Deputy Premier: will you direct that member to apologize, or do you believe that masks help spread the virus?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP talking about parties with misinformation is quite comical. Again, playing politics with the death of Albertans is the lowest form of politics, and this government will not do that. We are focused on protecting lives and livelihoods. This is not about politics. This is about working together as a province to get through the largest pandemic in 100 years in this province. We're focused on that. That's the job we're going to do. We're not going to get distracted by the political games of the Official Opposition.

2:00

Ms Notley: The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that Albertans, who are being lectured to take personal responsibility, are being distracted by the misinformation put out there by members of this caucus that they will not withdraw. You have two more members suggesting that we are being too careful in our schools and we need to do less to keep our schools safe. That information needs to be withdrawn. Those people have to apologize to Albertans, yet you refuse to hold them accountable. Who are you scared of? Who are you more committed to, Albertans or the rump in your caucus?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order, first of all, Mr. Speaker. Second of all, we won't be lectured by that member, who has not called out the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for wishing a female politician dead, who has not released information on which members of her caucus were part of the sexual assault investigation that she admitted took place. We won't be lectured when it comes to that. Again, we're not going to play politics with Albertans' lives. We're focused on protecting lives and livelihoods, and we encourage the NDP to get to work to help Albertans and to stop playing the politics of fear and smear. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

COVID-19 Contact Tracing Data Gaps

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier failed to prepare for the second wave. We warned him more than a month ago that Alberta needed more contact tracers, but just like so many aspects of this pandemic response, he failed to act. Yesterday Dr. Hinshaw admitted that there has been a backlog of cases growing over several weeks. Now this government is simply giving up on contact tracing for Albertans diagnosed 10 days ago or more. That's

tens of thousands of close contacts. The Premier has been briefed. Now, will he give us the specific number of Albertans exposed to COVID-19 who will never be told because of his incompetence?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, there you go again, the NDP focused on name-calling in the middle of a pandemic. Again, we're not going to play politics with lives. We're not going to play politics at a time when Albertans are dying. It's disappointing to see the NDP do that. Instead, this government is going to continue to focus on protecting lives and livelihoods and helping lead our province out of the great pandemic that we are facing, the largest medical crisis in the history of this province. That's the way that we're headed, and again I'm going to strongly encourage the NDP: stop playing the politics of fear and smear; let's get to work protecting Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this government has failed Albertans on their lives and livelihoods because they've been too busy playing politics. Indeed, yesterday Dr. Hinshaw said: I recognize this lack of follow-up is far from ideal, but we need to focus our resources on current cases in order to have the most impact. That's triage. It's an act of desperation because the system is completely overwhelmed, and case numbers continue to soar. That's not me; that's the medical experts. The Premier is responsible for providing the resources that Dr. Hinshaw and AHS need. Why didn't he listen to medical experts' warnings? Why did he fail to prepare us for this second wave?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, no expense has been spared when it comes to Alberta Health Services to deal with the pandemic. We continue to work each day with AHS and Dr. Hinshaw to make sure that all the resources are in place. We're dealing with an unprecedented moment all across the globe. Again, the government will continue to do what needs to be done to protect lives and livelihoods and to stand with Albertans. Maybe, just maybe, one day that hon. member and the opposition will stop playing politics and get focused on saving Albertans' lives and saving Albertans' jobs.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this government has failed to do what needed to be done because targeted measures only work if you have the data to do the targeting. If the Premier had prepared for the second wave when he had time in the summer, we could have flattened this curve with effective targeted measures, but instead thousands of Albertans have been infected while he didn't and procrastinated, and up to 80 per cent of those infections will never be traced. Yesterday Dr. Hinshaw apologized that we have to make this move into triage. But you know what? It's not her fault. It's this Premier's. Will he accept responsibility for this collapse in contact tracing and apologize to all Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, every jurisdiction in the world and certainly in this country is seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases. The Premier and his government have spent the last seven months making sure that our health care system would be able to deal with COVID-19, bringing in masks, creating capacity, dealing with ventilator issues. In fact, this province was able to help other provinces deal with ventilators. What that hon. member is saying is completely ridiculous. He continues to want to play politics at a time when Albertans are dying. We're not going to do that. We're focused on protecting lives and livelihoods. The Premier and the Health minister will have more to say at 4:30 on the direction of the province on COVID.

Economic Recovery and Diversification

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, 2020 has undoubtedly been a challenging year for Alberta, to say the least, particularly for Alberta's

business community. Alberta's government has been there since day one, supporting job creators through these difficult times. In June the government released Alberta's recovery plan, a bold, ambitious plan to rebuild our province, diversify our economy, and create jobs. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: as we near the end of the year, can you please provide the Assembly with the actions outlined in the recovery plan taken to date?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Our recovery plan is designed to build on our strengths. We have a strong foundation in energy, agriculture, forestry. We're going to build on those strengths and make sure we have a plan to diversify our economy. That's why we've rolled out initiatives around natural gas, petrochemicals, hydrogen as well as our innovation and technology strategy. We have the beginning of breakout technology companies in the city of Calgary in particular. From Kidoodle to Attabotics, Benevity, we have the beginnings of unicorns there. Now we're also ranked in Calgary at number 52 in the world for emerging technology cities. It's encouraging.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has always been a leader in innovation and entrepreneurship and given that Alberta is home to a young, highly educated, and entrepreneurial workforce and given that jurisdictions around the world are looking to modernize their economies by ensuring that new and home-grown technologies are built into the foundation of every sector, to the same minister: how will Alberta move forward with modernizing our key industries through growing our technology and innovation platforms?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People often compare Alberta as the Texas of the north because of our strong history in agriculture and energy, but Texas was purposeful decades ago in making sure that they had a diversified economy. Now they have one of the strongest, most diversified economies in the United States. We're taking a page from there to be purposeful in our approach, and I commend the Member for Lethbridge-East. There are a whole bunch of areas down there in agriculture innovation, advanced manufacturing, food production, technologies that are being developed down there in southern Alberta. That's a path forward for a diversified economy. I commend the efforts down in southern Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that the vast majority of Albertans are able to rattle the names of our major energy companies off the tops of their heads and given that Alberta also has incredible strengths in things like machine learning and artificial intelligence and given that Albertans should be able to list off the globally recognized companies that come from our tech and innovation sector, can the minister please get us started by telling this Assembly some of Alberta's accomplishments in this space?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it should be celebrated in this province. A lot of people in this province don't even know the fact that an Albertan recently won a Nobel prize, Dr. Michael Houghton at the University of Alberta, for his efforts in virology. That should

be, you know, on every billboard around there, the fact that we have this innovation happening here in our province. That's going to lead to some diversification here in our province as there are commercial applications with the research that he's doing there. This is from the foresight. This is going back many years, over a decade of work, going into this here in Alberta to make sure that we're at the forefront of innovation. We're also at the forefront of AI, machine learning, quantum computing: lots of work ahead in this area.

Mask Policies

Member Ceci: Alberta has the highest number of active COVID-19 cases of any province in Canada. Alberta is also the only province without a mask policy, one of the most basic steps to protect businesses and families. Maybe the Premier has failed to act because his extremist friends like John Carpay have told him not to. Mr. Carpay's group even published a manual to help antimask extremists defy municipal mask bylaws. Will the Premier condemn John Carpay for putting lives and businesses at risk with his antimask crusade?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yet again, if that's all the Official Opposition could come up with when we're dealing with the largest health situation in a hundred years in this province, to start talking about somebody that's not even a member of this Chamber – we're not going to play politics with Albertans' lives in the moment of this pandemic. Our government is going to continue to be focused on lives and livelihoods. The Premier will have more to say to Albertans at 4:30 in the press conference on a direction that we can work on to be able to accomplish those goals together and move our province forward. We'll do it despite the NDP continuing to play politics each and every day.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you. Given that Mr. Carpay's manual includes directions like, "Do not wear a mask" and "Hope that other people in Alberta become tired or frustrated with mask-wearing and refuse to comply in very large numbers" and "Protest. In large numbers" and given that this is a recipe for spreading COVID-19 to massive numbers of families, businesspeople, seniors, and health care workers, I'll ask the Premier this: have you or any member of your staff or any cabinet minister consulted with John Carpay about masks, and will you make it clear for the record that Mr. Carpay is required to wear a mask where bylaws exist?

2:10

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. The only people and the only party inside this place who are citing Mr. Carpay as a source for things are the Official Opposition, who for weeks have been citing him as he criticizes the government. I guess the question is: if he has a concern with what Mr. Carpay is saying, why does he continue to use him?

Again, our government is not focused on that, Mr. Speaker. We're focused on lives and livelihoods and managing this province through a pandemic. We are not going to swoop to the NDP's level and continue to play politics at a moment like this. Shame on them.

Member Ceci: Given that rhetoric from people like Carpay helps spur the march of people attending unmasked rallies like the one that was held in Calgary this weekend and given that potential superspreader events like these not only put people in attendance at risk of COVID-19 infection but the broader community as a whole, will this Premier finally reject the misinformation and conspiracy theories of the fringe elements in his party and publicly denounce those who openly defy mask bylaws in our province?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to talk about people outside the Chamber with the precious time that we have inside this building, but if you want to talk about superspreader events, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was at one in Red Deer and certainly has not apologized to this Chamber. Is the hon. member going to call out his own colleague for that behaviour?

I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we're not going to waste our time with that. We're not going to waste our time with the NDP politics. We're going to spend our time focused on protecting lives and livelihoods. The Premier will have more to say at 4:30 on the direction this province is going to go when it comes to COVID, but I can assure Albertans that we're not going to take the NDP approach of fear and smear politics.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has a question to ask.

Mask Policies and Workplace Safety

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's food production and grocery retail workers are heroes. They kept our society functional through the worst days of the spring public health restrictions. But now, as with so many aspects of the COVID-19 response, these workers have been forgotten by this Premier in the second wave. UFCW 401, who represents many of them, wrote to the Premier on Friday and told him that his failure to bring in a provincial mask policy is putting workers' lives at risk. Why has the Premier failed to protect the lives and livelihoods of these Albertans that we all depend on for food?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I think this pandemic has really driven home to everybody in this province how important our critical supply chain is and how important groceries are to us every single day. We know how important those workers are to each and every one of us. We respect them. We love what they do for our communities. We want them to be successful and be safe in their workplace. We're going to continue to listen to Dr. Deena Hinshaw, the chief medical officer, to make sure that we have safe workplaces across Alberta.

I'd also encourage that member to tune in to the Premier's speech at 4:30 this afternoon about further measures being taken.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the single largest outbreak of COVID-19 in Canada was at the Cargill meat-packing plant in High River, a plant the agriculture minister declared completely safe the day before Cargill shut it down because it wasn't safe, and given that workers in food plants across Alberta are being exposed to COVID in communities without municipal mask bylaws and that 80 per cent of new cases will never even be traced right now, why is the Premier so recklessly and unnecessarily putting our food supply chain at risk by failing to provide a mask policy, that every other province in Canada already has?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with our employers to make sure that we have safe work environments across this province. The one thing I do want to highlight is that all those small-business owners that are out there in our province have taken measures to create safe work environments for the people that are working there. You see this in your coffee shops. You see this in your restaurants. You see this across Alberta, the steps that they've taken at lightning speed to make sure they put up Plexiglas, have hand sanitizer there, to make sure that when customers come in, there's a safe environment. We're going to continue to work

with our health officials to make sure we have the right policies in place here in the province of Alberta to sustain our safe supply chain, to make sure people have food on the table.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, that minister is a part of an Executive Council who employs Albertans, and given that I continue to hear from his employees that they do not feel safe at work, that they're not being allowed to work from home, and that in many places there is no requirement to wear masks right now in their work environment and given that these same workers are at the mercy of municipal councils, who pass bylaws, and their employers to enforce them, why is this Premier stalling on taking this basic, obvious step to protect families and businesses and essential workers in Alberta? Why are we the last province in the country to not have a provincial mask policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a comment with respect to Alberta government employees. We're taking every precaution in ensuring that they have a safe workplace. We're taking advice from our chief medical officer to ensure that all guidelines are followed. We are using masks in and out of the office, only removed when employees are sitting at their desks. We have installed barriers in our work settings. The health and safety of our employees is job number one.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has the call.

Skilled Trades Promotion

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Skilled trades workers are indispensable to Alberta's economy and keep our lives running smoothly. Without our tradespeople we would not have heated buildings, mechanically sound vehicles, functioning plumbing, or heavy-duty equipment for businesses. The list is endless. Clearly, skilled trades workers are crucial in every facet of our lives. Unfortunately, there is a perception that earning a trade should only be considered as a backup plan to attending university. To the minister: how do you suggest we shift this perception and promote that learning a skilled trade has as much merit as any other postsecondary degree?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the sister of an electrician I could not agree more. Tradespeople are the backbone of our province, and we must continue to support them as we face these unprecedented times here in Alberta. The Skills for Jobs Task Force recently submitted their report, which included recommendations to increase awareness of the value of skilled trades careers and strengthen enrolment in apprenticeship programs, change student and public perception so apprenticeship education is seen to be just as valuable as a university degree, and expand the apprenticeship model to other careers and occupations. A skilled trade absolutely has as much merit as any other postsecondary degree, and Alberta's government is committed to that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta's population is aging and more baby boomers are retiring every year, with a larger number of those retirees being tradespeople, and that this is creating an ever-increasing shortage in skilled trades workers and given that making trades training

accessible to as many Albertans as possible will be crucial to filling the labour shortages, to the minister: in what ways are you looking into ensuring that skilled trades training is accessible to everyone, including those in more remote locations?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, this is a time for bold leadership, and Advanced Education is currently undertaking the largest postsecondary review in the province's history. The Alberta 2030 initiative will transform the adult learning system to focus on providing the high-quality education, skills, and training needed to get Albertans back to work to meet current and future labour market demands and drive innovation to make Alberta competitive in a 21st-century global economy. A major focus of Alberta 2030 is improving access to education and encouraging a wider range of potential learners to participate. Access to skilled trades should not be limited by geography, and we're working to make sure all Albertans have access.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that now more than ever Albertans are looking to alternatives to a university degree and that many businesses are willing to pay the costs of classroom training for apprentices while many university students graduate tens of thousands of dollars in debt and given that, contrary to popular belief, a career in skilled trades can be a viable path towards a high salary, to the minister: how do we ensure secondary school students are properly informed of the financial security a career in skilled trades can provide?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that important question. Our government knows that the skilled trades do provide a viable path toward a high salary and a successful lifelong career, and we're working to make sure that all Albertans know this, too. Part of the work done by the Skills for Jobs Task Force was to find ways to ensure students are properly informed of all the benefits a career in the skilled trades can provide. The task force provided recommendations to increase awareness of the value of skilled trade careers, and I'm looking forward to next steps in implementing important recommendations such as this that will put student learning first.

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

Financial Reporting by Government

Ms Phillips: Thank you. Without the Auditor General, Albertans would not be able to see the full story of UCP financial incompetence. For example, the UCP created the embarrassing war room, gave it \$120 million, and stopped the public from knowing how the money is spent, but now, thanks to the AG, we at least know that the war room spent 65 per cent of its contract budget on agreements where there were no bids, competition, no safeguards against giving contracts to friends. Will the Finance minister simply table the list of who got no-bid contracts from the war room? We will find out eventually, Mr. Speaker, so the minister might as well fess up now.

2:20

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General has made some recommendations, and we are following all of those

recommendations, including the ones with respect to contracts. What I would like to highlight is that our government appreciates and recognizes the great value in the energy industry, and that is why we've created the war room, and that is why we're standing up for the energy industry, something the members opposite never did one day while they were in government. We believe in the future of the industry for the province and the nation and in the future of our great energy workers across this great province.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that the Auditor General also confirmed to Public Accounts that the UCP materially misstated their financial statement by \$1.6 billion, fixing it when they were caught, and given that the Finance minister also broke the law in disclosing what happened with losses in the heritage trust fund earlier this year, can the Finance minister confirm that his Q2 update this afternoon will break his track record of incompetence and not be a public policy Dumpster fire riddled with accounting errors and material misstatements, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we want to talk about incompetence, let's talk about the incompetent financial literacy on the other side of the House. The reality is that the Auditor General gave this province a clean, unqualified audit report, and for the benefit of the members opposite, that means that all funds are accounted for and appropriately reported. That's the reality. Those are the facts. The members opposite need to improve their financial literacy.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that we just heard, Mr. Speaker, no accountability for the fact that the AG has found – and I quote from this morning – misstatements improperly accounted for, quote, not reflective of economic reality, and directly contravened accounting standards and given that it appears it is now government policy to push the financial laws to the point where the UCP breaks them and only fixed them when they got caught, should Albertans expect three more years of fudge-it budgets coming from this Finance minister? It is shocking coming from this minister, who is a CPA. He should know better.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite continue to spread misinformation. That seems to be all they have these days. Again, the Auditor General gave this province a clean, unqualified audit report. There are no funds that are not properly allocated, and no funds are missing. I'd like to ask the member opposite: where are the missing funds from the AER when they were in office? We continue to look for those funds, and those funds are truly missing. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The Member for Lethbridge-West had her opportunity. There may be other opportunities, but for now it's the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Keystone XL Pipeline Provincial Spending

Mr. Bilous: The NDP supports the Keystone XL pipeline project, and that's why in government we committed 50,000 barrels a day to move the project forward. This past March the UCP committed up to \$7.5 billion to the KXL. In the Auditor General's latest report and confirmed in committee this morning, the UCP failed to report \$100 million that had actually been spent in the 2019-20 fiscal year. Can the minister provide the total amount of taxpayer dollars that

have gone out the door to date for the KXL, and why did the government withhold this cost from Albertans?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, there was nothing withheld from Albertans. Here's what was withheld from Albertans: the support of the members opposite for the energy industry. The members opposite never did support KXL. We believe in the future of the energy industry. That's why we have made a strategic investment in expanded pipeline access out of this province. We know that that expanded access will be generational in terms of improving the fortunes of future Albertans. That's why we made that investment. That's why we support the energy industry.

Mr. Bilous: I wish I could get an answer out of the minister.

Given that the deal consists of \$1.5 billion for an equity stake along with \$6 billion for loan guarantees and given that the Auditor General confirmed the loan guarantees come into effect on January 1 and given that there's uncertainty around the future of the project and that it may take months to determine whether it will proceed and given that the loan guarantees actually come into effect 19 days before President-elect Biden is sworn in, to the minister: if President-elect Biden stops the KXL, how much taxpayer money will have been spent?

The Speaker: You might not like the answer the Finance minister gave, but you certainly aren't able to use a preamble to express your disappointment.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's very hard to take the hon. member's question seriously when he opens up by saying that the NDP supports Keystone. His own leader opposed Keystone XL. In 2015, when she was asked about Keystone, she said: we're against it. She then ordered Alberta's representative inside Washington, DC, to abandon all efforts to push forward when it comes to Keystone. The NDP's history is to try to fight pipelines and try to keep our resources in the ground. We're not going to be lectured by them. Instead, we're going to work with our largest industry, and we're going to get our pipelines built.

Mr. Bilous: Given that in May the Premier stated that the loan guarantees didn't come into effect until the 2021 construction season and given that the Premier claimed that none of the \$6 billion in loan guarantees were at risk and given that the Premier would have known that that statement was not true since the loan guarantees come into effect on January 1, a simple question: why did the Premier lie to Albertans about this deal?

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member will withdraw his comment because he specifically referred to the Premier lying, and of course we know that the Premier wouldn't lie to Albertans because that would be unparliamentary.

Mr. Bilous: I apologize and withdraw saying that the Premier lied; I meant to say that the UCP government lied to Albertans.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we've been transparent with Albertans. We've been transparent on the great potential and opportunity that would lie with the Keystone XL pipeline. We've also been transparent with the risks, but we believe that the great benefit for future Albertans with the KXL pipeline far outweigh the risks, and that's why we made a strategic investment in the KXL pipeline. That investment has resulted in thousands of jobs this summer, at a time when we needed them. That investment will ultimately produce great generational benefit and wealth for future Albertans.

Red Tape Reduction

Ms Lovely: Businesses around the province have started to reopen and engage again with their consumers. Sadly, we lost a few of our small businesses to the COVID pandemic. However, Albertans are strong and entrepreneurial, and I'm confident that many new businesses will pop up with renewed optimism as things continue to improve. We must continue our efforts to reduce red tape and ensure a strong environment for business to flourish. To the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction: what further steps are we taking to make sure small businesses, new and old, are unencumbered by red tape?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question. The COVID-19 pandemic along with the current global economic recession has left so many of our small-business owners and our job creators in need of reassurance. That's why they want to know that Alberta's government has their back so that they can keep their doors open. It is a fact that small businesses disproportionately bear the brunt of red tape. We're working closely with our small-business industry panel, made up of small-business owners and stakeholders, to find working solutions to their concerns. Our work to cut red tape and implement changes remains to be the top priority of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the former incentives for technology companies were overly bureaucratic and cumbersome for businesses to apply for and given that we provided solutions to make it easier and more attractive for tech start-ups to invest, to the minister: what other specific areas are we looking to improve red tape reductions for when it comes to larger companies and attracting them to invest in Alberta?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. By adopting best practices to speed up approvals, digitize government processes, and ensure requirements are clear and concise, we're giving job creators back their time, and as we know, time is money. Our first annual report showcases that we're doing three times better than other jurisdictions at reducing the compliance costs to businesses in our province. This cost reduction means we're allowing our businesses to focus on what they do best: create jobs and jump-start the economy. When you make it easy and efficient for businesses to operate, you send a message to investors that we're serious about making Alberta open for business.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that many may be skeptical about how much red tape prevents business activity and given that it's important for us to showcase results when it comes to our plan to reduce red tape here in the province of Alberta and given that it is not only businesses but also workers that benefit from the increased job opportunities that come when business can thrive without being burdened by overregulation, to the minister: what additional activities have we seen here in Alberta since our reduction strategy started more than a year ago?

2:30

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year and a half ago we set out a bold path to make Alberta the freest, fastest moving economy in North America. We counted all the requirements demanded of businesses and Albertans. The result was sobering. Albertans have to face over 670,000 regulatory hoops. We've already been able to cut red tape by over 6 per cent and save Albertans over \$476 million. Since we've started, we've seen growth in agriculture and increased investment activity in mineral extraction. When people invest in Alberta, good jobs accompany those investments.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: This year students are receiving hundreds of dollars less for their education than they did under the NDP. This is a result of harmful UCP cuts to pay for their \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout. Students are getting less support, plain and simple, in the middle of a pandemic. The UCP put corporations before Alberta students. It's clear. I brought a motion forward yesterday to address this problem and to urge the government to restore the funding that they cut. To the Minister of Education: why did your caucus vote against supporting students, and why did you cut their funding?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, it's incredibly rich that the member opposite is bringing up education funding given that the NDP voted for a motion that would absolutely cut per-student operational funding to boards right across the province of Alberta. If the Member for Edmonton-Glenora's motion had passed last night, a number of school divisions, including the Lethbridge school division, the Peace River school division, the Wetaskiwin school division, the Sturgeon school division, and more, would receive less operational funding per student, and the member opposite knows that.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, under our government every single school division did in fact receive an increase in operational funding this school year.

Ms Hoffman: Given that none of the UCP's mathematical acrobatics change the fact that students got \$433 less this year and given that it's clear that the government didn't even read the motion because they keep reciting talking points that don't reflect reality and given that these drastic cuts mean more students crowded into classrooms with less support in the middle of a pandemic and given that schools are not funded with magic wands, Mr. Speaker, that they're funded by governments making choices that reflect their values, why is boosting shareholder dividends for big insurance companies more important to the government than standing up for the safety of students and their education?

Ms Schulz: Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite knows that the \$4.7 billion number she continues to repeat is absolutely untrue. We are absolutely committed to providing a world-class, high-quality education system. Every single school authority across Alberta received an increase in operational funding for this school year, roughly \$120 million right across this province. I'd like the member opposite to answer. Which one of those school divisions does she think should take a cut: Lethbridge, Peace River, Wetaskiwin? Let's hear it.

Ms Hoffman: Given that more than 500 schools have identified as having COVID in them in less than the last two weeks and given that tens of thousands of students have already been forced into

isolation and given that I fear that government inaction will force mass school closures and that hundreds of thousands of students will be forced to stay home, I want the minister to look into the camera and promise Alberta parents that she won't fail them the same way her government did in the spring, that she won't lay off more than 20,000 educational workers, that she won't leave kids without supports, that she'll actually stand up and pretend to put children first.

Ms Schulz: Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. A lockdown is what the members opposite have been wanting. It's what they have been creating chaos and uncertainty about. That is what they have been saying for the last number of days.

Our Minister of Education has done an exceptional job in working with school divisions. We are so incredibly grateful for the passion and hard work demonstrated by administrators, by principals, by vice-principals, and teachers right across this province to keep kids safe. They're doing an excellent job of limiting spread in schools, Mr. Speaker. Our Minister of Education will continue to work with health officials and school divisions to make sure that we can address the situation presented by this pandemic. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo had his opportunity. If he wants another chance, he can speak when he's on his feet.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Less than a week ago research groups at the University of Alberta made remarkable breakthroughs towards finding a cure for diabetes. In September teams at the U of C found ways that could not only perhaps cure Alzheimer's but actually prevent the disease. Meanwhile this government continues to pummel our institutions with budget cuts. To the minister: will you stop your attack on postsecondary institutions that are providing life-saving research in the midst of a global pandemic?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that simply isn't the case. Our Minister of Advanced Education is working with postsecondary institutions to ensure that they maintain and, in fact, increase and enhance their research capacity. He's also working with our institutions to ensure that our PSIs and universities and colleges are able to deliver world-class education and ensure that great labour market outcomes follow for our graduates. We're also working to ensure that we're delivering the most efficient government relative to the MacKinnon panel advice, and we're following through on that.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that this is the Finance minister, he should know full well that they have taken hundreds of millions of dollars out of our postsecondary institutions, putting research in jeopardy. Given that the University of Alberta is leading a public consultation for the COVID vaccine and given that this government has taken money out of the University of Alberta so that we ended up with 1,000 job cuts from that one institution alone, to the minister: does your government think that you know better than the combined staff and educators at our universities?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to work with our postsecondary institutions to make sure that they have the resources to do research. We should be applauding the fact that we have a Nobel prize winner at the University of Alberta, and the work that he's been doing has been there for over a decade. This

work started, actually, under Premier Stelmach and the foresight that he had in working in partnership with the private sector and the Li Ka Shing initiative at the U of A. We're going to continue to be there for research, make sure as well that we can commercialize that research. This is a shocking idea, maybe, to the NDP, but we actually want to commercialize research to create jobs. It's a novel idea, maybe, to the NDP.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that Dr. Houghton was actually working on a vaccine for the virus behind COVID-19 and at the very same time given that this UCP government cut the U of A's budget, which resulted in more than 1,000 job losses, will the minister stop attacking Alberta's future and recognize that the cuts he makes hurt potential Alberta innovation and research and our ability to help to develop life-saving vaccines in the midst of a global pandemic?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to utilize the endowments that we have here in the province of Alberta to continue to fund research in our province. It's a bit shocking to me that the critic for Advanced Education does not understand the structure for research and how it is funded in this province. They were in government for years, and he still does not understand the finances and how research dollars are allocated. This is done in collaboration with the industry. We want to continue to make sure they commercialize this work. We're going to continue to do that with Albertans, make sure we have the right money going in there. We commend the U of A and the researchers that are there doing the vaccine work. They're some of the best in the world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Economic Recovery and Women

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Women are a vital part of Alberta's economy, and visionary female entrepreneurs and innovators have built the province we live in today. Our recovery plan is based on getting all Albertans back to work, and I am pleased to see these initiatives the Alberta government has taken in creating successful environments for women. To the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women: what are the numbers telling us about our recovery plan's support for women?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We do know that this pandemic has disproportionately impacted the employment of women, and we are seeing positive shifts in this area. According to the Business Council of Alberta women aged 25 to 54 have returned to regular levels of employment. Almost as many women have returned to work as men, with an estimated 143,000 women returning to work compared to 145,000 men. We also see that the unemployment rate for women is lower than that for men, at 9.4 per cent. But many Albertans are still struggling, and we're going to continue to work to support them.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Speaker, given that 60 per cent of minimum wage earners in Alberta are women and that women are often clustered into lower paying occupations and given that women make up about half of the population of Alberta but only represent about a third of enrolments and graduates in STEM – or science, technology, engineering, and

math – programs and only about a quarter of the employees in STEM fields, can the minister please update the Chamber on how our government is looking to strengthen these numbers?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, STEM fields are very important to Alberta's economic recovery plan, and our government is introducing the women in STEM award program to help young women reach their career goals in science, technology, engineering, and math. These 50 awards, each worth \$2,500, will be made available to women pursuing studies in STEM while working to advance equity in their fields. The women in STEM award program is one way that we can help pave a path forward for more women to pursue STEM careers. Women are shattering glass ceilings in STEM, and it's so important that we continue to encourage the momentum in these fields.

2:40

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP and Gil McGowan continue to target the small businesses of women entrepreneurs in hopes that they will close up shop and given that the members opposite continue to spread misinformation about our government's commitment to creating the best possible environment for women's job creation, can the minister please comment on what you have heard from Alberta's strong women about the launch of the women in STEM award program?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reaction to this program has been overwhelmingly positive. I do want to provide quotes from some STEM leaders like Alexis Pappas, executive director of the Canadian Blockchain Association for Women, who have reached out to say how this is a huge step in supporting 50 amazing women, who will now have access to this taxpayer investment. I know that the minister for the status of women was thrilled to announce this funding at a round-table on women in STEM with leaders in the field like Marian Gayed from NorQuest College, Nancy Biamonte from the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta, and others. They've voiced how important this is to Albertans.

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

In 30 seconds or less we will proceed to Tablings to the Clerk.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta annual report 2019, the College of Midwives of Alberta annual report 2019, the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors annual report 2019-2020, the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2019-20.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. During Members' Statements, in an unconventional way, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall raised a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language Members' Statements

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that you have said on many occasions that members have the right to have

uninterrupted two minutes of members' statements. I do understand that it may not be the strongest point of order I have raised, but a caution from you would go a long way to maintain decorum in this place, so we shouldn't be using the words that we otherwise don't use or that would otherwise be unparliamentary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm not even sure that I'm going to hear from the Government House Leader, which I'm sure he's disappointed by, but I do find the point of order a bit rich when later in question period the hon. the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview made an accusation that the Premier may have lied and quite appropriately withdrew and apologized and said that what he meant to say was that the "government lied" and, in fact, that the "UCP government lied."

I believe that during the member's statement that was made by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, he did on three separate occasions say that they, referring to the NDP, not a particular member, "lie and . . . defame," "And the NDP? It confirms that their propensity is to lie," and that the NDP go out of their way to lie. Now, it seems very similar to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview did, and we proceeded as if it wasn't a point of order.

But I would like to provide a little bit of comment because I have provided extensive comment on the use of the word "lie." With respect to members' statements, on December 1, 2010, then Speaker Kowalski said the following things about a member's statement.

When I introduced this in 1993 and at subsequent times after 1997, when I was elected as Speaker, there were some principles that were enunciated [with respect to members' statements]. Those principles, just to repeat them: number one, that [they are to] be given as wide a latitude as possible with respect to members' statements, that [members should] have an opportunity to stand in the Assembly and to provide a statement in [its] widest possible latitude, period; number two, we would ask the Speaker never to interfere and intervene and not deal with a point of order about things that are said in a member's statement. Point number three . . .

And this is the important point for all members here today.

. . . was that members [should] speak on policy . . . and with the highest civility and the highest decorum and not bring in personalities and personal attacks on other members.

Which the use of the word "lie" may do.

I would like to point to two separate rulings that your Speaker made. First, on June 18, 2019:

Here's what I will say. Let us all endeavour to raise the level of decorum and not imply that the government is lying, that individuals are lying. Let's do our very best to not try to do indirectly what we can't do directly . . .

My sense is that that will help raise the level of decorum in this Assembly.

I then went on to say, on July 9, 2020 – it seems like every six months or so the Assembly needs a reminder.

On June 18, just a little more than one year ago, 2019, I said these words.

Here's what I will say. Let us all endeavour to raise . . .

And I think you get the point.

Hon. members, this is exactly what happens if we race to the bottom. We saw it exactly displayed for us by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview when he made an accusation about a member and then said that the UCP government was lying. I think we can see what happens. It's not helpful for decorum. While it wasn't a point of order, I encourage all members to do better. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

The second point of order has been withdrawn.
As such, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I've received a message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

Please be seated.

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the 2020-2021 supplementary supply estimates. When supplementary estimates are tabled, section 4(5) of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act requires that an update to the consolidated fiscal plan be tabled. Accordingly, I wish to table the 2020-2021 mid-year fiscal update and economic statement, which serves as the updated fiscal plan. The mid-year fiscal update provides the framework for additional spending authority for the government.

Mr. Speaker, the supplementary supply estimates will provide additional spending to the 17 government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$4.9 billion in expense funding, \$479 million in capital investments, and \$207 million in financial transaction funding for the government. Of this funding, the highest single expense is \$1.2 billion for COVID-19 pandemic response pressures. These estimates will authorize transfers totalling \$7 million between eight departments.

Thank you.

2:50

Government Motions

47. Mr. Toews moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2020-21 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion according to Standing Order 18(1)(i). Is there anyone wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or have the hon. the Minister of Finance close debate.

[Government Motion 47 carried]

48. Mr. Toews moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2020-2021 supplementary supply estimates for three hours on Wednesday, November 25, 2020.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is not a debatable motion according to Standing Order 61(2).

[Government Motion 48 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 48

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

[Adjourned debate November 18: Mr. Turton]

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain has eight minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Seeing not, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate of Bill 48, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2)? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). I think it's very interesting that we see this omnibus piece of legislation come to this place again. It's a pattern from this government to seem to try and create bills under this red tape reduction ministry.

I want to take us back just a little bit. I want to back us up just a little bit and remember the Premier's motto as he came into the campaign in 2019. His mandate, as it were, was jobs, economy, and pipeline. Those were the key pillars of this government's plan. Mr. Speaker, now we've seen two make-work red tape reduction implementation acts come from this minister that have done none of those things, have accomplished no new jobs, have accomplished actually losing 50,000 jobs before this pandemic even began. Now we see over 260,000 Albertans out of work. We see no new jobs. We see the economy continuing to shrink. Before the pandemic began, the GDP of this province contracted .6 per cent, and it's continued to contract at record rates throughout this pandemic as we see the economic state of the world retract as well. We see no new progress on pipelines.

It's simply shocking that when we look at this massive piece of omnibus legislation – it's so heavy that it makes a huge thud on my desk every time I look at it and every time I pick it up, yet it does nothing to justify the existence of an Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. We can go line by line, and we can look at every single act affected by this. We can look at the Alberta Centennial Medal Act. We can look at the Animal Health Act. We can look at the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. We can look at the Fatality Inquiries Act. We can look at the Historical Resources Act. We can look at the land and property rights tribunal act, the Land Titles Act, the Maintenance Enforcement Act, the Modernized Municipal Government Act, the Municipal Government Act, the New Home Buyer Protection Act, the Post-secondary Learning Act, the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, and the Wills and Succession Act.

Mr. Speaker, what is in common with every single one of these acts that is being affected? The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction will not be responsible for implementing a single one of the policies that we are debating today. The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has simply no job other than to bring this book, basically, this bill that is as thick as a book, into this place and table it in front of this House. That's the minister's entire job.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's focus on jobs, economy, and pipeline? Oh, yes, he's creating a job – a job – for his Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to do nothing and to go on and actually cost this government more bureaucracy and introduce additional steps when we should be focusing on actually doing the work of this place. It's simply shocking that in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of the night we see these changes being

brought in that don't create a single new job, that don't impact the actual minister himself, that aren't implemented by the minister himself.

It simply seems like this government is scrambling to justify the minister of red tape, scrambling to justify why they've created this ministry, this associate ministry, really, and scrambling to justify why this minister needs to exist at all, because, Mr. Speaker, of course, many of these changes, not all of them – there are some technical and substantive changes that I'll get into in a bit here – but certainly many of the changes that are being brought in are statute in nature, so this could have been brought in under a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, right?

We're talking about some things such as repealing the Alberta Centennial Medal Act or repealing most of it. It's unclear to me why the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction determined that it was necessary for the minister of culture and tourism to have the ability to revoke those medals still. That's unclear to me. I think the government needs to explain that. But then also in the middle of the pandemic, instead of focusing on creating jobs, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is focused on repealing medal-awarding ceremonies. That seems to be the priority of this government. That is probably textbook, something that could have gone into a statutes amendment act.

I think the government needs to explain again: why are we paying millions of dollars to have the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction come in here and do the work that was already being done by other ministries, that will not be overseen by the minister's office, that was not necessary to be introduced in this giant piece of omnibus legislation? Mr. Speaker, I think it really does beg the question: why does the minister of red tape even exist? Why are we here debating issues from the minister of red tape when the minister himself isn't responsible for implementing a single one of these changes.

Of course, I mentioned that I'd get into some of the substantive changes. Mr. Speaker, I think perhaps some of the most substantive changes come in the changes under the Municipal Government Act and the Modernized Municipal Government Act, the MGA, as we commonly refer to it here. We know that there are going to be some significant changes to the MGA that are going to have real impacts on how municipal governments such as cities, towns, and counties, of course, operate in this province. Some of those changes, I think, are not necessarily bad changes. I think some of those changes – we just want to see some answers to some questions we're going to be asking.

I mean, Mr. Speaker, I think that there are a certain number of rights being taken away from municipalities, devolving the power of municipalities, and indeed taking powers away from municipalities. I'm a little bit confused. I'm a little bit confused because, of course, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction hasn't consulted with municipalities on this, but perhaps the Minister of Municipal Affairs has. Perhaps we'd like to hear from the minister who would actually be responsible for implementing these changes.

We'd like to hear from ministers who actually know the details of these bills, and we'd like to hear from ministers who actually are responsible for the acts that are being affected. Again, it's pretty disappointing because just like in the first red tape reduction act – of course, we're on number two now – it seems like time and time again the minister got up in this place, got up in press briefings and technical briefings and said that, basically, he didn't know because it wasn't his file; it was somebody else's file. He was just introducing it as an omnibus piece of red tape reduction.

That's what's so strange about this bill and so strange about the way this ministry operates, this minister operates, and this government operates. It's so strange because it appears that they've created

this additional level of bureaucratic red tape to repeal certain statutes, to repeal certain legislation that could have been done by their existing ministers. It doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense why the UCP continues to use these red tape reduction bills, these omnibus pieces of legislation as justification to celebrate their work, Mr. Speaker, in the middle of a pandemic, when even before the pandemic they lost 50,000 jobs, as I'm sure all members here know, and they gave \$4.7 billion away to already wealthy and profitable corporations, resulting in those job losses. We saw companies like Suncor lay off thousands of workers in Calgary and across this province after taking profits because of those corporate handouts.

And then here in the middle of a pandemic when over 260,000 Albertans are now out of work, after this government fired 11,000 health care workers, driving doctors out of this province, and failing to address the crises that exist in long-term care, we see this red tape reduction implementation act, that is now introduced in this place, that simply doesn't actually create a single job, doesn't actually do anything with respect to the pandemic, doesn't do anything with respect to helping Alberta families, doesn't do anything with respect to making sure we have a functioning government here in this province.

3:00

Hidden in this omnibus piece of legislation, hidden in this bill, seem to be a few things. It seems to be a desperate attempt to justify the existence of the red tape reduction ministry. It seems to be a desperate attempt to say: look, this minister has a real job; he's introduced multiple omnibus pieces of legislation. Well, Mr. Speaker, news flash: not a single act that's being amended in either of the bills this minister has introduced is overseen by the minister himself.

This minister is literally, it seems, Mr. Speaker, an errand boy. It literally seems to be pushing papers around in this Assembly, literally seems to be taking pieces of legislation from one ministry and compiling them into a binder and then tabling them in this Assembly. That seems to be the entire role of this minister. The red tape reduction minister is a bureaucratic addition to this system. It is creating additional red tape in this place. It's simply shocking that the other ministers, who are actually overseeing these changes, could not have introduced these statute changes within their own legislation or through a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, which we see all the time. Really, buried in this legislation is a desperate attempt by this government to scramble and explain why they're spending millions of dollars on this associate minister's job, who really is not able to introduce any original content to this government.

On top of that, we see all these hidden omnibus things around municipalities. We see changes to the authority of municipalities and their ability to control things like reserve land and development applications. We see significant changes there that were brought in. It seems to be without any consultation. We know the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction isn't doing the consultation. He's busy pushing the papers around. He's busy compiling information from all the other departments. We know the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction wasn't doing it, but, Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Minister of Municipal Affairs also did not do any of the consultation.

When we look at these pieces of legislation, when we look at the policy that's being implemented in these massive omnibus bills, it becomes very clear that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has completely failed to introduce legislation that actually even makes sense. This House deserves to actually be able to analyze these substantive changes in issues like municipal affairs

and the Municipal Government Act. It deserves to have the opportunity to analyze these substantive changes and ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs questions around it, to have those discussions, to have proper briefings from the minister and officials on those problems, on the substantive changes and policy changes being brought in.

Mr. Speaker, instead of having any of that, we see this paper-pushing happening. We see the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction instead busy compiling changes around Alberta's centennial medal awards in the middle of a pandemic, busy not creating a single job, busy supporting a government that is giving \$4.7 billion away to profitable and wealthy corporations, firing 11,000 health care workers, and doing not a single thing for the over 260,000 Albertans who are currently unemployed because of this pandemic. Of course, we know that 50,000 of those Albertans were unemployed before the pandemic even began. Basically, it's a result of this government's \$4.7 billion giveaway to wealthy and profitable corporations.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2), when we look at the work that this minister is doing, when we look at the bills that this minister is introducing, when we look at the bills that this whole government is introducing, it looks again like they are scrambling, that they are falling behind and they are trying to justify the existence and spending of this money, just like the money they're spending, the \$30 million, on the embarrassing war room, just like the policies introduced by the worst Finance minister in Alberta's history, the current Finance minister. The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is unable to create a single new job, is unable to justify the existence of the ministry, is unable to justify the legislation, is unable to defend the legislation. The minister himself will not actually be implementing a single change that is brought in in this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's really quite interesting when we look at this legislation. It's quite interesting when we look at how this government decided to create the red tape reduction ministry, how they decided to administer the red tape reduction ministry, and how they wanted to implement this legislation. When we see it again, it becomes very clear that the ministry of red tape reduction seems to be a piece of red tape, seems to be something which is completely unnecessary, seems to be something which governments were successfully doing as part of the miscellaneous statutes amendments acts for decades in this place. In this very Assembly, in these very seats governments were able to make these changes using miscellaneous statutes amendment acts. Mr. Speaker, when there were substantive changes, those legislative changes were brought in separately as individual pieces of legislation such as the changes we're seeing here in the MGA.

But it seems that because this government had created this ministry and decided to spend millions of dollars on this ministry, they had to introduce this omnibus piece of legislation. They had to bury a couple of hidden gems in it. They had to create this legislation that simply does not make any sense. It simply does not justify the existence of the minister. It does not justify why we are spending millions of dollars on this minister and his political staff. It doesn't justify why we are spending additional funds to create this ministry and have the minister run around from minister to minister, whether it's the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, the minister of agriculture, the Minister of Children's Services, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Service Alberta, the Minister of Advanced Education. All those ministers were affected by this legislation, and they all have changes they have to implement, so every single one of those ministers in Bill 48 will have work to do.

But, Mr. Speaker, it appears the work of the red tape reduction minister is now done. He's gone to all these ministries, he's talked to all these ministers, and he's compiled their requests, put them into a fancy little document called Bill 48, tabled it in this place, and that was the role of the red tape reduction minister. The red tape reduction minister very clearly is a piece of red tape that exists to go and compile documents, to go and talk and ask the other ministers. The associate minister's job is to go and ask ministers what they want to do. That seems to be the entire role of the red tape reduction ministry.

It's simply shocking, Mr. Speaker, that a government that claims to be so focused on jobs, economy, pipeline, that claims to be focused on cutting red tape, that was so riled up about cutting red tape that they created a whole ministry for it, is unable to find actual work for the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. They were unable to find actual policy for the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to administer. They were unable to find actual legislation and initiatives that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction should be administering. They are actually unable to introduce legislation that would justify and explain why the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction even exists.

We know, again, that all of these other ministers I've mentioned already will have substantive policy changes they have to implement, right? We know there are going to be significant changes to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I recognize the Member for Calgary . . .

Member Ceci: Buffalo.

The Acting Speaker: Buffalo. There it is.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much for the opportunity to address 29(2)(a) and to follow up on some of the comments and hopefully have my colleague address some of those comments that I make. As members of this House know, my colleague is the critic for Infrastructure, and he's been very clear with many of the challenges to that file and the minister's work on that file. I don't know if he wants to address any concerns with regard to infrastructure that are identified in this Bill 48, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2).

I know he's done a really good job in kind of putting a higher context to the concerns that he and others on this side will be sharing with you, notably that we're in the middle of a pandemic and there are significant job losses. The fact that this bill purports, as the associate minister talked about when he introduced the bill, that it'll help job creators get people back to work – I think my colleague is correct in raising suspicion about that statement. Perhaps he wants to go further and tell us more about his concerns or about all that. I was wondering what he thought the most egregious parts of this bill and the claims it purports to make with regard to red tape reduction are.

I'll cede to him.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Carry on, Member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo for his comments as well. I think that certainly when we look at the red tape reduction implementation act and how it has been presented to Albertans and the initiative that this government is taking in terms of saying that this is a substantive job-creation program – and I'm going to quote the minister here.

Quote: we've taken action toward becoming the freest and fastest moving economy in North America, but we're not done yet. End quote.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, that's what the minister said about this piece of legislation, and the truth about that, the truth about what the minister just said is that none of those things have actually changed as a result of this legislation. The minister, unfortunately, it appears, didn't know that, and the minister probably didn't know that because the minister is not responsible for implementing any of the things in the act – right? – any of the policy changes that are going to be coming in the act. I mean, you can't fault the minister for not understanding the intricacies of the different pieces of legislation and the acts that are being affected because the minister is not responsible for them. It's not the minister's job. The minister's job is to go and compile and be the errand boy and put all the pieces of paper together into one binder. That's the minister's job, so, I mean, you can't fault the minister for that.

I think that certainly when we look at the minister also talking about how this is a job-creation program, how this is going to create incentives and investment in Alberta, it's simply not true. We're seeing the economy continue to contract. We've seen 50,000 jobs lost before the pandemic even began. Over 260,000 Albertans don't have work right now, Mr. Speaker, and this government and this minister are doing nothing to address that. It simply doesn't make any sense. When this minister gets up every single day and talks about how he's trying to create investment in Alberta and how his bills are going to create investment in Alberta, not a single one of those changes that are being brought forward here actually works to do that. Not a single one of the changes being brought forward here actually consulted with members of the industry around that, actually consulted with investors around that, actually consulted with municipalities, actually consulted with businesses. Nobody was actually consulted in this piece of legislation, so when the minister gets up and says that we're going to have a fast-moving economy, that it's going to grow and create new jobs, it doesn't make any sense.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, it's not the minister's job. The minister wouldn't have known because the minister is not responsible for those issues. The minister is not responsible for implementing a single thing in this bill. The minister, of course, is an errand boy, is here to create additional bureaucracy, is here to create additional red tape, is here to add extra steps into government and to create jobs for the minister and his friends. That's what the minister's role is, it seems, in this place, to compile all these pieces of paper, put them together, and introduce them in one omnibus piece of legislation in this place.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the type of work being done here in this place, we look at the type of priorities this government has, we look at the type of infrastructure this government is investing in, we see very clearly that this government is not standing up for working Albertans. It's not fighting for working Albertans. It's not creating an investment environment for working Albertans. Instead, the government, it seems to me, is more interested in creating busywork and make-work projects for this Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. Instead, it seems that it is more interested, for example, in taking down signs about hospitals which were supposed to be built but were now cancelled or delayed significantly. It seems that the only job this government is actually able to make is additional red tape.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 48?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to be speaking on Bill 48, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). When speaking with constituents on a daily basis as well as when campaigning in the last election, one of the top concerns was the amount of red tape that hinders job creation as well as costs the taxpayers money. Our government made a promise to have a red tape reduction plan that will cut red tape by one-third to reduce costs, speed up approvals, freeing job creators to get more Albertans back to work. Red tape has been a costly and growing burden on Alberta businesses, and it kills jobs. The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has been working hard to fulfill our campaign promises of reducing red tape by one-third. Bill 48 will eliminate some of this red tape to put our government one step closer to our target. Job creators see faster approvals and get more savings. In addition, several changes will make life better for Albertans by reducing wait times and speeding up approvals. This will increase access to important information.

There will be various ministries that this legislation will affect. To encourage economic growth and job creation, the bill will cut red tape from the Municipal Government Act to encourage development and make it easier for businesses to grow and create jobs. These changes will speed up approvals while providing greater certainty for industry.

We are also enacting golden girls legislation to allow unrelated seniors to live together and support each other while living in a single dwelling, much like they did in the TV series *The Golden Girls*.

There will be changes in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act which will eliminate barriers that prevent adult adoptees and former children in care from connecting with lost loved ones and their own histories. It will allow a freer flow of information from Children's Services to former children in care such as survivors of the '60s scoop. There will also be changes to simplify and modernize terms such as changing the term "parents" to the term "guardians."

Changes to the Historical Resources Act will eliminate the registered historic resource designation, which removes unnecessary burdens for property owners. This is because a registered historic resource designation offers little value to protect historic properties and resources and hasn't been used since 2004. Owners of properties with this designation will no longer have to spend time on inconsequential paperwork, something we can all get behind.

Changes to the New Home Buyer Protection Act will get rid of business assessment reports because they are duplicative and add needless costs for home builders and homebuyers. This will save Alberta's builders and homebuyers \$2.7 million per year. This change will save money while not compromising safety as permits, inspections, and new-home warranties remain in place to make sure that condo buildings are safe. Getting rid of these reports reduces costs for home builders and frees them up to do what they do best, building communities and creating jobs for Albertans.

There are changes to the Animal Health Act that have been needed for a long time. These changes will remove the need to have a certified expert available during business hours to sell low-risk drugs to Alberta's livestock producers. This will save authorized medicine sales outlets time and money. Authorized medicine sales outlets are important to so many of Alberta's livestock producers as they are ensuring that they're able to get the low-risk drugs they need for their families when they need them.

The bill will also reduce delays and create certainty for people buying and selling property in Alberta by cutting red tape in the Land Titles Act. We have heard that there needs to be more efficiency in the land titles registration system, and we listened. There will be changes to the queue system to allow parties to close

their real estate transactions once they have submitted their registration documents rather than making them wait until the registration process is complete.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on about all the amazing red tape reductions this act will produce, but the fact is that the legislation, that reduces unnecessary red tape, will save time and money and improve the lives of Albertans. It also fulfills our UCP government platform commitment to reducing red tape by one-third. We have seen, through the minister's annual report this November, that our government has saved Albertans \$476 million so far by cutting red tape. We have also made great strides in our first year of red tape reduction, but this legislation puts us closer to our goal.

Through red tape reduction we are quickly moving to become the freest, fastest moving economy in North America, but our government knows that the hard work is not over. We need to ensure that we continue to remove unnecessary red tape for job creators so that they can create jobs and grow the economy. Alberta's government has over 670,000 regulatory requirements that cause a burden to job creators. Our goal is to reduce these requirements by one-third by spring 2023. By passing Bill 48, we are one step closer towards this goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 48? The Member for Edmonton – sorry; Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Zeroing in on it.

The Acting Speaker: Yeah. I'm getting down there.

Member Ceci: Yeah. You're there now.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address Bill 48 for my first time at second reading. You know, I appreciate the comments prior to me from my colleague the critic for Infrastructure. I want to focus on primarily the MGA amendments that are substantial in this bill. I wonder why we were not dealing with something that's straight such as a bill particular to the MGA and why it's in a collection or omnibus bill such as what we have before us.

I think that many, many municipalities around the province are very interested in amendments to the MGA. If they had an opportunity to weigh in on those discussions with regard to amendments to the MGA, we would have seen probably a bill the same size as this, Mr. Speaker, before us, and that would have been a good thing because of the ability of interested stakeholders. Planners, associations, the BILD Association, which used to be called UDI, Urban Development Institute, and municipalities and their planning departments as well as professionals throughout the province who are involved in planning, development, and building would have relished the whole idea of taking some time as opposed to what I think is somewhat of a rushed approach to looking at the amendments to the MGA before us.

3:20

I do want to point out, in addition to the MGA amendments – and I'll get back to that – the Historical Resources Act. I'm not sure why that is being removed from the provincial system. I understand from some of literature put out surrounding this bill release that it hasn't been used since 2004, but I think there is a value to the province being able to designate property historic resources for all time in this province. We are a relatively new province, and, you know, we need to recognize that there is historic value in some of the built environments, some of the buildings in this province, and the fact that there will no longer be a registered historic resource in the

provincial system is, I think, off the top of my head, just not a good thing.

Municipalities can still designate property historic resources, but it comes with a cost to those municipalities. If they're going to say that something can't be developed beyond its current state because of its importance to the historic resource in this province, then they have to compensate owners. The province doesn't have to do that, and the fact that the province hasn't done that since 2004 should not be a reason to not keep it around. That would be one observation I wanted to make off the top.

The next observation. Much like my colleague who's the Infrastructure critic has identified, you know, when the associate minister in debate brought forward this bill, this is what he said. I don't have the – he said:

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 . . . bill . . . Overall, they will provide needed certainty to these job creators.

The previous speaker before me talked about job creators. I'm not sure why that word is being used repeatedly, those two words together, when we're talking about the development industry. Overall the needed certainty will improve things for the development industry, developers. Certainly, they work to take raw land in some cases, take disused land in other cases, and to upgrade it with servicing, and put it back into circulation for a variety of uses: commercial, residential, industrial, and other uses. But, for me, Mr. Speaker, the fact that we're talking about job creators repeatedly here and not kind of putting municipalities or planning departments on somewhat of an equal basis kind of tells me that this work was really done for one side alone, and that would be for the development industry. There may be very, very, very legitimate reasons that municipalities across this province need to look at the timelines for developers and say: wait a minute; you haven't done all of the things necessary to make sure we've got quality development for Albertans.

I think that's a line that I can come back to repeatedly in the number of things that are amended in this bill, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities will lose the power to determine their own development timelines, and, instead, the province of Alberta will legislate and put in regulation what those timelines for development will be. I was asking the minister earlier today to provide some clarification on those timelines for development permit applications to be completed because in the legislation it talks about 20 days to determine whether a development permit application is complete. Twenty days to determine whether it's complete.

This happened in many, many, many cases in the city of Calgary and probably at planning departments all over the province, where development permit applications are submitted but on review the assigned planner finds they're not complete. When they circulate that development permit around the multiple parts of the cities that review these things – whether it's, you know, the planning department, they give it to water services, then give it to roads, and then give it to other departments to review – they find that it's not a complete application. There are only 20 days to determine whether that application is complete.

So they say it's not complete, and they give it back to the developer, but then there are other timelines in here: 40 days to

approve it or deny it, and then 60 days in total to approve or deny the application from the time it was received. When does the clock start again in the event that developers are handing in, essentially, uncompleted applications? That information wasn't clear from my reading of the bill. It's not yet cleared up from discussing it with the minister, and I think municipalities will be poorly served if they don't have the clarification before this bill is passed as well.

With regard to the additional 5 per cent of reserve land, you know, a long-time, now retired planner, the head of a planning department, that I talked to said that that was a surprise to him, that there was an additional 5 per cent allowed for municipalities to potentially require from developers. Typically, I believe the number is 10 per cent, and that is for MR lands or school lands in communities. The fact that this clarifies it and says, "No, you can't have the additional 5 per cent," well, I would suggest that from the research I've done, people didn't know you could take an additional 5 per cent, so I'm not sure how this clears up any red tape and provides greater certainty for job creators to do their work.

The other thing that I wanted to raise is generally the consultation for this, particularly the part that deals with the MGA. Last week in question period I heard a response from the now Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, and he said, you know, the work they did was last summer with regard to the consultations: the planners association, the AUMA, the RMA, various departments of planning in municipalities, as well as the – and he didn't say it was BILD, but I assume it's the association that developers are members of, so BILD Alberta. That was a consultation held last summer, probably under COVID rules, which means that there's no opportunity to really get together and tear the MGA apart and look at things that could be improved.

It's been a long time since, you know, that original act was put together. There have been improvements to it, of course, but I think the focus on the improvements in this bill with regard to the MGA don't do the act justice, don't do the needs of Albertans justice with regard to that very complex act that guides planning and development through this province. A short-term, perhaps less-than-robust consultation with a view to get a few things before this House to qualify as red tape reduction is less than a substantive way of looking at the needs of this province, as I just mentioned.

3:30

I just want to talk about a few other things in the bill, and that would be the removal of the Lieutenant Governor in Council and cabinet from oversight of certain aspects of the MGA. It's, you know, I guess, a desire to create a speedier ground for developers in this province. I'm not sure it benefits the municipalities throughout this province to have another set of eyes look at this, almost like a Canadian Senate, though I don't agree with the Canadian Senate, but almost like that, where there's a mostly sober second thought in looking at the work that the minister is bringing forward to amend. But if the Lieutenant Governor and cabinet are taken out of it, then, really, where's that sober second thought?

Another thing in this bill with regard to the MGA is all of the talk about airport authorities being included, all airports being included with regard to planning approvals. It's my understanding that the minister now has the ability to override or fast-track approvals in and around airports, on land adjacent to airports. We in Calgary have the AVPA, airport vicinity protection area regulation, where only certain types of development can occur. Under this bill now the minister can approve those developments in the AVPA area and supersede the actions of the local planning authority, which, notably, had to go to the minister to say: look, we want to do this development, or the city wants to approve this development. They

had to go to the minister, and the minister had to go to, ultimately, the cabinet to get approval.

Now that step has been removed. The minister can approve it themselves. I'm not sure why that's being done. I'm not sure if they saw the process as broken or municipalities as reluctant to do any of this approval work and entities wanting to come forward and cut out the cities.

I think another really big area in this is the off-site levies. As people probably know, off-site levies are something that gets negotiated between planning departments, municipalities, and developers. Usually the association – it used to be UDI, now BILD – negotiates on behalf of all developers in that region to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I could see both the experience and the sharp analysis that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo does bring to this file, specifically. I was very interested to learn, first of all, from someone that has an encyclopedic knowledge of all of those acronyms that are in this bill. I would be curious to know – I'm particularly concerned about the state of our airports here in the province, quite frankly, and I know that COVID has hit this industry harder than many – if the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo could use the last few minutes to help to shine some light on that.

Thanks.

Member Ceci: Yeah. The part of this bill before this House that we debated, I think last night, talked a lot about the airport situation, and it's true. They are being really challenged, and the lending of money for operations no doubt will help bridge them through, but it does put the province of Alberta in a difficult situation as well because of all of the fiscal mismanagement that's going on in the province right now. Actually, the Finance minister is up addressing, probably, some of that mismanagement right now.

The off-site levies, though, are something that I wanted to just take an opportunity to speak a little more about. In this bill it talks about facilities and infrastructure. It tries to clarify what municipalities can essentially charge for when they charge developers off-site levies. It says "facilities" and "infrastructure". I wonder what the effect on good planning and development will be as a result of, as I see it, narrowing the kinds of infrastructure that can be levied. Certainly, it's not something that will assist municipalities around the province because not every municipality is the same, and the fact that this bill tries to codify this could be problematic in the future.

I know that when I was a city councillor, the commissioner board and the planning department got together and negotiated with, then it was UDI, around what off-site levies would charge for a hectare of development and for roads, which boundary developments would be paid for by developers and which would be paid for by the city. All of that was the process, the subject of negotiation, so taking that away from municipalities is something that I'm not sure what the – I don't think that the impact is understood at this point in time by the presentation in this bill.

I have many other things that I want to speak to, perhaps at additional time periods, Committee of the Whole and third reading, but I did want to touch on all of those areas at this point in time and to underline again that the work in this bill with regard to the Municipal Government Act, I think, is tilted away from the approving authorities having the proper authority to work with developers throughout this province. It's slanted towards the

development industry, and I really wonder why that kind of slant has taken place. Certainly, the development industry is very powerful in this province, and certainly the development industry weighs in on contributions to candidates throughout this province.

They used to do more of that when corporations could donate to individual candidates. You know, there have been some changes to all that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 48? I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2), and I want to thank the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction for tabling this important piece of legislation. Our government was elected on a mandate of jobs, economy, and pipelines. This is the mandate that serves the best interests of Albertans, but this mandate can only be achieved through the removal of red tape. Specifically, our mandate was to cut red tape by one-third, and red tape is one of the biggest issues facing investors these days.

Business owners have told us very clearly that red tape is one of the barriers that prevents them from starting new businesses. The previous NDP government added more layers, layer after layer, to the employees and also to the business owners, red tape that did not ensure better business management policies or improved OH and S protocols but more useless paperwork that did not increase productivity or prosperity.

3:40

We don't have to look too far to see the former NDP government's track record on red tape. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which is also known as the CFIB, performs a yearly cross-jurisdictional red tape analysis that evaluates each province's performance on red tape, and after listening to a few of my colleagues, especially the speakers from the opposite side, I can tell you why from 2017 to 2019 Alberta received an F, meaning failure, totally failed, the worst grade available.

Mr. Speaker, for many years red tape has made Alberta one of the worst places to do business. There was no certainty for the investors, no robust regulatory system that was fair and consistent, and no examples of businesses thriving that investors could take confidence in. The truth is that the previous government watched businesses leave, unemployment rise, and investment flee. These are the direct consequences of enormous government involvement that discourages private enterprise, something the NDP knows how to do very well. I have heard to help job creators – job creators are the small-business owners, and this red tape is one of the costs or one of the barriers for the small-business owners. It adds to the cost to do business in Alberta.

In the last election we campaigned on getting Albertans back to work and restoring investor confidence in this province, and I'm encouraged, actually, to tell Albertans that in this short time the CFIB gave Alberta a grade of B minus, a big improvement from the failing grade of F of the previous government. They see our commitment and willingness to cut unnecessary regulations and paperwork. This grade also shows that Alberta is on the right track, but there is no doubt that we have much more to do.

Between May 2019 and June 30, 2020, Alberta's government has cut red tape by more than 6 per cent. We are well on our way to our overall goal of cutting red tape in Alberta by one-third and restoring the confidence that so many investors have in Alberta's economy. Our government remains committed to reducing red tape, a goal that will reduce costs and speed up approvals, which will allow job

creators to get more Albertans back to work. With the economic impacts brought forward by COVID-19, the decline in oil prices, and a global economic recession, it is important that we do everything possible to make it easier for businesses to operate. Bill 48 is another piece of legislation that will make it easier for businesses to operate, create jobs, and be a driver for Alberta's economy.

This bill proposes 12 amendments across eight different ministries that will reduce costs and speed up approvals. Mr. Speaker, we know that there are a lot of bad regulations which limit the ability for businesses to expand, grow, and employ Albertans in every part of the province. Removing unnecessary and redundant red tape will save money, time, and resources that protect the environment and the safety and health of Albertans and will also restore the fiscal responsibility Albertans can expect from their government.

Some of the changes include cutting red tape from the Municipal Government Act to encourage development and make it easier and simpler for businesses to grow in local municipalities across the province.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs will have the ability to set firm deadlines for development in large municipalities, providing clear deadlines for those working on significant projects. Mr. Speaker, it is important, after listening to the previous speaker, who was not sure what a complete application and incomplete application are. Businesses need to know throughout Alberta what the deadline is for the development. They want to make sure that if they apply for development, there is a guideline. There is some red tape which can put some barriers for them, so I thank the minister for removing this red tape and also providing the clear deadlines for different municipalities within Alberta so that developers know. When they are going to bring in some businesses, they need to know the deadlines.

This will also make sure that residential construction projects are completed on time and on budget while speeding up the approval process, something I know many constituents have asked for in my riding of Calgary-Falconridge.

This bill also gets rid of building assessment reports, which are redundant and add unnecessary costs to home builders and homebuyers. This change will help save approximately \$2.7 million a year for Alberta home builders and homebuyers. These useless reports currently add about \$400 to the price of a new condominium, a cost absorbed by both the builder and the buyer of the residential works like condos. Eliminating the use of building assessment reports will not compromise the safety of Albertans as the same information is collected under the Condominium Property Act and Safety Codes Act.

All of the amendments presented in this bill are common-sense changes that reduce costs and speed up approval timelines. Thank you to the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction for bringing this piece of common-sense legislation forward. I know that many of my constituents will appreciate these changes. I urge all members of this Chamber to vote in favour of this important piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to our colleagues for the opportunity to rise in consideration of Bill 48, which is titled the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020

(No. 2). I have to say that in my review of this legislation to date, it seems like the bulk of the changes are with regard to the Municipal Government Act, and it would be great if the minister would answer a number of questions that have already been raised by folks in the community and some in this House. I'll be happy to reiterate some of them here.

The first one is: why try to lump all of this into an omnibus bill when the substance is significantly directed towards municipalities and the rights and autonomy of municipalities? I've been talking to several councillors who have talked about their frustration and the erosion of their ability to be able to do their work. Specifically, tighter timelines for development permits means that they will not be able to undergo the thorough peer review offered by the Urban Design Review Panel and, specifically, Calgary Planning Commission. Both bodies are comprised of citizen experts in the fields of planning, design, and development, and they are relied on for their expertise and for their great community engagement and growth that is sustainable.

This should be a priority for all of us, ensuring that we are growing but we are growing in a way that sustains community and sustains services. I know that, specifically, when it comes to the need for new schools and fire halls and police and libraries and rec centres, we should be making sure that we have people who are experts in urban design engaging properly in these types of decisions. The right timelines may force council today to become de facto development authorities.

3:50

Also, the issue has been raised with the importance of council meetings and their scheduling. It means the timelines may get blown. That means that all development permits are possibly going to get denied, kicking them to the minister, who has less local knowledge, less local engagement, and, frankly, less local accountability. There is repeal of the ability of the city to be able to negotiate timelines with industry without discretion. There is concern that everyone will lose because of this concern to rush to the finish line so quickly as opposed to ensuring that we do proper development in a way that focuses on community and makes sure that the needs of the community are reflected through the decisions of the local representatives.

I can't help but reflect that the times when we hear government stand in this place and talk about local autonomy are times when there are cuts to services; for example, when education services are cut significantly or when folks are laid off at the city who used to do things like cut grass and provide recreational programming and supports for students and families, when libraries are closed. At that time the government is very quick to say: local autonomy; we respect the decisions of local decision-makers. But what led to those decisions is lack of ongoing provincial support and funding – right? – so very quick to lay blame on local autonomy and local decision-making. But when municipalities and those who are elected to govern the municipalities want to work to exercise their current authority, we're told it's too cumbersome, it's too bulky, and that it needs to be fast-tracked to cut red tape.

I have to say that cutting red tape by having unsustained growth in one area of the city without having growth in another area of the city doesn't seem like smart urban planning. Cutting red tape by forcing relationships on municipalities that they might not be in a position as representatives for those communities to be compliant in I don't think respects local autonomy. I don't think it respects the voters who elected folks to make those decisions on their behalf.

We certainly see that when government cuts police funding in this House – and we've given them opportunities to vote not to do that. We've put amendments forward multiple times to make sure

that we restored police funding. Government is, you know, moving forward on those cuts to municipalities, but then when municipalities look at their global budgets and how they can allocate portions of that to reflect the values of their citizens, even though municipalities had their funding cut by the province, the province says: oh, no, no, you can't do that. Well, the only ones, Mr. Speaker, that are defunding the police are the UCP. The only ones that are defunding the police are the government under the leadership of the Justice minister.

So in terms of working in partnership, it's interesting how – because that's the actuality of what's happening. That's the legitimate consequence of cutting funding for police. The movement that is being talked of globally wants to ensure that there are increased supports for social services, increased supports for the vulnerable, increased supports for the high-frequency folks who need to rely on the police.

When I think about some of the folks who've reached out to me who've needed supports from police over this last year, some of the ones that come top of mind that I'd say are probably the most heartbreaking are parents of disabled children who get to be a certain size, and some of the parents have reached out to me. Their children have violent tendencies, and they're worried for the safety of their child or of other children or of themselves in their own household. They have to call the police because they legitimately fear for their safety and well-being. I would love for us to have more supports in place for families.

A lot of those calls happened when schools closed in the spring and educational assistants were laid off, respite care workers were no longer available. So I would like to see there be an intentional focus on making sure that families have support, that families have the needs that they have met. I think that that's one area that this government could be putting some significant focus on right now instead of trying to package something under the associate minister's name. That is clearly an erosion of local autonomy under the MGA.

Some might say: well, maybe the minister doesn't want to own this; you know, it's not exactly a good-news piece of legislation for municipalities, and we have a new minister now, and we'd like to have a good relationship with municipalities. Fair, but then work with them and develop changes that you think reflect their values and your values. Don't continue to run roughshod over the rights and the abilities that local decision-makers have in their communities.

So those are reinforcing some of the concerns that are being raised by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the critic for Municipal Affairs, who, of course, has a very long track record as a former councillor and member of this place now for more than five years. I respect what he and what others have raised. I'd say that for growth in the city of Calgary this should be something that we all want to make sure we get right in terms of sustainability and future development.

Now, mind you, if the government is bringing in tolls for new infrastructure that's built throughout the city, maybe they don't care so much about sustainable growth and sustainable development because they'll just tack another toll when certain things grow beyond control, but I don't think that that is an appropriate use of our authority. I don't think that that is an appropriate way to run any jurisdiction and municipality or province. I think that we are elected to lead and to make decisions that reflect the needs of communities, and I would say that this erosion is not just detrimental to growth. I think it also maybe isn't intended to bring into question the role of local elected officials at all, but when it comes to school authorities or when it comes to municipalities, there seems to be a significant disrespect for the work that local decision-makers do.

I have to say that I was very proud of the time I was able to be a part of the Edmonton public school board and the work we did there. There was always this nervousness about: what's the future going to be for local autonomy when it comes to school districts? We continue to see threats of disbanding or amalgamating school authorities by this government, and I think that that erosion of autonomy at the beginning has led to much of that disrespect for local school board authorities. I think that this erosion, as outlined in this bill, has the potential of doing the same when it comes to local municipalities.

Is it fair for substantial actions like this to be hidden in an omnibus bill? That's something that folks have been saying. They've heard that there are changes to the MGA, but a lot of folks don't even know what piece of legislation it's housed in, and for good reason. The government hasn't been exactly clear in their communication of what this bill is. They put a title on it that they think fits with their brand, but the actual details haven't been clearly highlighted for a lot of folks. Did the Minister of Municipal Affairs consult with municipalities on this or was this something that was engaged on by the previous minister or were municipalities consulted at all? It seems to me, through reading this bill, that the priority is focused on developers and development and not on engaging with community and local decision-makers, including experts around urban design.

You know, we've seen other bills that are clearly aligned with corporate interests in this session. We see ones that take away protections from major injuries like brain injuries and the insurance bill changes that are being proposed here. We see other changes that are fast-tracked. They're giving away \$4.7 billion to already profitable corporations – that's on page 144 of the government's own budget – and now we see other changes to fast-track corporate development at the cost of local decision-making and autonomy of municipalities.

I know that councils are quite, quite busy right now dealing with COVID-19 and trying to ensure that they are leaders in their community, particularly in the wake of the government failing to act in a meaningful way, looking at the numbers over the last 10 days of COVID cases and the impacts on municipalities.

4:00

A lot of municipalities have been preparing for the second wave for several months as the government should have been as well. Municipalities rightfully are focused on making sure that their constituents can pay their mortgage, making sure that their constituents have jobs that they can rely on, making sure that their constituents don't get undue risk because of the government's lack of leadership when it comes to taking precautionary measures to protect its citizens, for example, being the only province in Canada that has failed to act on masking, being so stuck in denial of the realities of this virus and denial of science, denying the epidemiologists and the work that they have done to ensure that we have the right information to be able to make effective decisions. [interjection] Yes, science.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Science? I like science.

Ms Hoffman: Prove it. Demonstrate it. Show some leadership. Call on your Premier to show some leadership and to actually reflect the expertise of epidemiologists and scientists instead of continuing to ignore the realities.

The Acting Speaker: Member, through the chair, please.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm calling on the government, through you, to step up and actually prove, when they heckle

across the floor and they pretend that they like science, that they're actually going to be bold, they're going to listen to science, they're going to listen to the medical experts, and that they're going to act to protect the lives of Albertans, because it's been, I guess, 11 days now since the Premier has bothered to . . .

An Hon. Member: Who?

Ms Hoffman: Yeah.

. . . since the Premier has bothered to show leadership. I have to say that when parents text me and they say, you know: I appreciate that the Premier is in isolation because he was a close contact. "So was my kid in school," says this one mom who texted me today. She said: "You know what? He went home and was expected to continue with his learning. He engaged with his teachers through online communication." He didn't say: I'm in isolation; I can't do my job. This nine-year-old can continue to show accountability and to do his work in his schooling. He can focus on his timetables and on his Canadian geography and on his science concepts. He can do so using technology and engaging with his teachers. He can continue to keep his commitments, but the Premier has failed to do the same. This is some of the frustration that people are feeling right now when it comes to this government.

To continue on with red tape reduction – it seems that that is a topic that the government likes to claim that they have expertise on – I can tell you as somebody who owned a condo not that long ago that amendments to remove requirements for builders to have a building assessment, I am quite nervous about that. Having been somebody who lived in a new building . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak and provide some comments on the previous speaker, the member opposite from Edmonton-Glenora. I'm going to focus on one particular part of her speech. She mentioned working with local decision-makers, empowering them. She said: fair enough, work with them; create a plan. I think that is incredibly rich coming from the members opposite when local decision-makers, municipalities, residents in my constituency are asking to build a bridge that they want to pay for themselves, not out of the government coffer but out of their own pockets, and the members opposite say: no, no, no, not that kind of local engagement.

Member Ceci: Did they put up a hospital, too? Let them build a hospital.

Mr. Williams: "Don't do that. Don't do that kind of local engagement. That's too much. We don't want to listen too much to what they want. It's not convenient for our message and our narrative."

Member Ceci: What about a university?

Mr. Williams: "We'd rather drive political wedges in."

The former Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is heckling because he obviously has disdain for local officials. He seems to have been booted from that role after the electors decided: no more NDP telling us how to do . . .

Ms Hoffman: He's right here.

Mr. Williams: He's been booted from his role.

Ms Hoffman: He was elected.

Mr. Williams: I know that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora thinks that he got elected again, but he is not the minister.

Ms Hoffman: He got elected again. He's right here.

Mr. Williams: Fair enough. That individual may have gotten elected . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members, please. [interjections] Members, it's five after 4 on Tuesday. Direct through the chair, please, and, members, have some respect and direct through the chair as well. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Mr. Williams: Thank you. As I was saying – and I'm happy to direct through the chair – the Member for Calgary-Buffalo – I'll check my notes – is not the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Some Hon. Members: He never was.

Mr. Williams: He was fired by Albertans. They decided not to vote for them again. Albertans decided . . . [interjections] Oh, Finance. Pardon me. He's the critic for Municipal Affairs. Thank you for the correction. I stand corrected. Nonetheless, fired for being the worst Finance minister on record. The truth is that the members opposite, in whatever ministerial role they were in, had complete disdain for local decision-makers, and they continue in opposition to have disdain for their interests.

Now, these citizens in northern Alberta live very far away. Now, it's almost twice as far as Kinuso is from Edmonton, Mr. Speaker. If you go to Tompkins Landing, it is quite a distance, and those green things on the side of the road, they're trees. They're all the way up. It takes a very long time to get there. We harvest those trees in our mills, and those mills provide income and livelihood for our constituents.

If you want to talk about local decision-making, I'm all about that, Mr. Speaker. That is the number one thing I want to do, and that's why reducing red tape in this bill is important. That's why passing legislation that allows a user fee is important because local constituents will say: this makes sense for us in our situation. We need to support them in that instead of driving some political wedge for gamesmanship and trying to play politics with the livelihoods of Albertans.

The tragedy is, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite will continue to ignore and turn to their talking points, and after the speech is over, they will continue to say: we care about local interests. They will happily ignore the local interests of my constituents, and they will do it because they want to drive fear into the hearts of people in Edmonton and Calgary, where they think they have better electoral chances if they scare people.

I'm trying to inspire people to build a greater Alberta. We have Albertans in my constituency willing to put down \$200 million of their money to build a bridge, but that's not good enough for the members opposite. They say: you're not allowed to spend your money, because we're trying to drive fear into the hearts of people in Edmonton and Calgary, saying we're going to put tolls up on infrastructure we won't do.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, there is no other way to get this bridge built, and the members opposite are doing everything they can to prevent my constituents from getting what, I believe, is their due, their right. If they want to spend their money as they see fit to build that infrastructure, who am I, who is the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who are any of these NDP MLAs from stepping in the way of these Albertans? Why on earth would we think we have the entitlement to tell these folks who live farther away than most

anyone in this House travels to or could recognize as a regular commute? They can't.

As I said in my comment today regarding the bridge, the truth is that right now a good number of my constituents have to commute to work over an ice bridge. This is not part of a TV show on the History Channel; this is day-to-day life for my constituents. They have to cross an ice bridge to get home, and when the ice bridge isn't in, they have to drive around an extra hour and a half. That's just regular life for them. So why would we stop them from building the bridge? That's my genuine question.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry to interrupt, Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 48? The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in second reading of Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). It seems like we've got the real D team over there on the government side today, but I was pleased to hear the Member for Peace River speak a little bit about how local decision-making is his number-one priority. It's interesting. When that member had the opportunity to bring forward a private member's bill, it appeared that his first priority was actually rolling back women's reproductive health rights, but apparently now he shifted gear. We hope to hear no more from that member with respect to rolling back women's reproductive health rights, and he can focus on that local decision-making that's so important to him. So I look forward to that.

On to Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). I want to speak a little bit, Mr. Speaker, about some of the changes. I think that my colleagues have talked a lot about: this is really an omnibus piece of legislation. As we know, it's become a bit of a calling card for this government to try and cram in a number of things into a piece of legislation to, of course, you know, obfuscate from all Albertans what's really happening, hide that in a huge piece of legislation and call it that it's productive because they have a lot of pages to show off but not really highlight for Albertans the changes that we're making.

I mean, we saw that omnibus legislation is how they, of course, fired the Election Commissioner. They like to tuck things in, and I know that's the way they get things done because I think they have some kind of quota they have to meet in terms of pages of legislation regardless of how minor or nonimpactful those changes may be and then, of course, tucking some really egregious ones in there. That seems to be their calling card so far, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

Let's tackle, again, Bill 48. Now, there are a number of changes. I think 11 different pieces of legislation, if I'm correct, are amended by this omnibus legislation. I'd like to speak a little bit to the changes particularly that are made to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Those changes relate to a couple of minor issues. They seem to be predominantly focused on permanency or adoption placement for children. While I think it's actually very important – and I actually stood in support of a government member's motion brought forward by the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain in our first session of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, which talked about the importance of actually reducing red tape in the adoption process. I supported that because I've had the honour of meeting with a number of constituents who have either adopted children or are looking to adopt. As well, I know that's an issue that's near and dear to many members' hearts in this Assembly, many adoptive parents. I think that's a wonderful thing in this Assembly. There are

many people here who have adopted children and are seeking to adopt.

We know there are lots of different reasons how families get to that point where they're looking to adopt. Maybe it's something that's always been part of their plan or something that they've dreamed about doing, opening their home to a child in need, which is a really remarkable thing, of course, Mr. Speaker. There's also the fact that for some families that journey to adoption actually comes after a very hard road of going through infertility, pregnancy loss, losing children, and that can be a very emotional and heartfelt process. Ways to speed up and to make that process less arduous are very important for those families and of course for those children.

When we're talking about adoption, we are talking about children who don't have a permanent home, a permanent family, and all children – we just celebrated National Child Day on November 20. Of course, part of that, the rights of the child set out in the UN declaration on the rights of the child, is that every child has a right to a family. Some of us take that for granted. For those children who do take that for granted, they're the lucky ones, and that's a fortunate thing. I tell my children that all the time, that we have great fortune in our family and in our province and certainly in our lives right now. Of course, there are children who don't have that. It is a right of the child to be loved and to have a family.

Certainly, adoption is a wonderful process to place children in need in loving, caring homes. We also, of course, want to balance that with the need to make sure that in making that decision about what home to place a child in need, whether they be a child in care, in the custody of the government, under a permanent guardianship order, we take great care and caution as to choosing that family that they're placed into because we want to make sure that we are protecting the safety and the social and emotional and physical and intellectual development of those children, to make sure that we're doing a careful process.

The adoption process is always that balance, Mr. Speaker, of trying to expedite the placement of children in need in loving homes with the obligation that we have to make sure that that process is done properly, that children are placed not just in safe homes but in homes that are appropriate for that child. That's been, I think, a guiding principle that has woven its way through the child intervention process for some time.

We know that we have in this province a disproportionate number of children in care who are indigenous, almost 70 per cent now, Mr. Speaker, and we shall see if those numbers are changing. Those are based on last year, and it's been a challenging year for a number of children across this province. It's been a challenging year particularly for children in care. I understand even the minister has acknowledged that there have been troubles and difficulties in placing more children in care into permanent homes through permanency. Certainly, it's been a challenging year.

All those children have a right to that, but we recognize through our child intervention system, because of the disproportionate number of indigenous children in care, that it's not simply placing children in a new home, in a safe home. We have some lessons and legacies that we have learned in this province, not just in this province but across the country, with respect to, for example, the '60s scoop, Mr. Speaker, where indigenous children in particular were removed from their families, from their cultural connections, from their indigenous communities, and placed in homes where they lost that connection, forcibly in many circumstances, to their indigenous culture and traditions.

There are lessons that have been learned. I know, certainly, on this side of the House we take those lessons very seriously, and I was very proud, when I was elected as part of this caucus, to see the

work that had been done when the NDP was in government to address the overrepresentation of indigenous children in care through the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, which I know some of the sitting members of this Assembly were part of. It was an all-party panel. It worked with stakeholders, it worked with experts, and it worked with indigenous community leaders to talk about: how do we address the disproportionate number of children in care?

Of course, key to that, Mr. Speaker, was the acknowledgement that in order to do that, we have to keep those connections for those children in care to their indigenous families and communities and their traditional and cultural background so that they don't lose that part of who they are. Those are the lessons that we have learned and that we've had to learn from the '60s scoop, from residential schools, from the intergenerational trauma of indigenous children and families in this province and in this country. At the heart of that work on the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention was keeping those connections of children in care to their family members and to their roots but also recognizing that all children benefit from having permanent homes, permanent adoptive homes.

What I am disappointed about, Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill 48 is that while it does address the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and it does address adoption, there are big pieces of the work that were committed to by the action plan established by that ministerial panel, by all parties still represented in this House, and by the current Minister of Children's Services to implement that action plan with respect to changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. As you may know, that action plan set out immediate, short-term, and long-term goals and targets. There were specific targets about what needed to be achieved by what day.

We are quickly reaching the end of 2020, and one of the short-term actions that was committed to under that action plan and was committed to in this House by the current Minister of Children's Services – she has restated her commitment to the action plan, and one of those objectives and key outcomes from that action plan is to open up and amend the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and make significant changes, yes, around permanency but also around clarifying the First Nation band designate role and to look at other recommendations and the learnings that have come out from the immediate actions from that panel and to say: here are the legislative changes that are going to be made. This was a commitment, a clear commitment, to amend the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, to look at those pieces, to clarify the First Nation band designate role.

Yet here we have before us – and let's be clear. We're reaching near the end of the session, Mr. Speaker. I don't know whether the government has intended to bring forward any further legislation than we already have before us, but if this is the sum total of the amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, it is not a satisfaction of the commitment made by all parties in this House and by the Minister of Children's Services to fulfill the action plan under the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention.

In fact, I would rather see, Mr. Speaker, that this act is only opened when those thoughtful amendments are being brought forward. To see this act opened but not have those changes made I think is an affront to the work that was done under that action plan. It was an affront to all the indigenous communities and stakeholders and experts and children who were looking at that action plan and saying: there is a commitment to making changes with the goal of decreasing the number of indigenous children in care but also making sure they have closer connections and ties to their community. I'm looking forward to hearing from the Minister of Children's Services on whether or not she believes that what has

been brought forward here today in Bill 48 satisfies the commitments made under that action plan.

I recognize that there is an additional challenge that is going on right now with respect to child intervention in this country, which was the introduction and passage of Bill C-92, which is federal legislation to allow for designated First Nation communities to actually develop their own legislation around child intervention. The complexities around that work, which I recognize, do not absolve the Minister of Children's Services and this government from their responsibilities to fulfill the action plan items set out in the A Stronger, Safer Tomorrow action plan. That was a commitment made.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, frankly, there is a lot of work to be done, and it's work that can only be done if it's done thoughtfully, comprehensively, and intentionally. Right now it appears that the minister does not seem to see that as a priority. It is not a priority to commit to fulfill the commitments that were made under that action plan. That's not just an affront to the work that was done by the people on that panel; it is to the children of this province and particularly the indigenous children in care, who are relying on all that work to continue. I hope to hear from the Minister of Children's Services on whether she believes that Bill 48 and the amendments that have been brought forward as part of that bill on the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act represent, in her mind, the fulfillment of her commitment under the action plan. I really do hope we hear some answers on that.

I want to speak a little bit – you know, having said that, Mr. Speaker, that was my grand hope when I looked at Bill 48 and I saw that, oh, it's amending the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. I didn't understand the notion of including that as part of red tape reduction. That seemed quite counterintuitive. But I thought: "Okay. Well, let's look at what's actually in here. Maybe it's going to fulfill those commitments." I was quite disappointed on that front that there was no fulfillment of those obligations under the action plan.

There are some changes in here, however, Mr. Speaker, that seem to be administratively fine. I think that they have provided some clarity, for example, for individuals in a family who might have access to adoption records, who may seek application for adoption records, expanding that to include siblings, to include children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren of an adopted child. That ability to have access to those adoption records is important for those family and cultural connections, answering questions that children may have about who their families are.

Mr. Speaker, there's one provision in Bill 48 which I believe actually speaks to something that the esteemed MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud before me, Dr. Bob Turner, brought forward a number of times. He was interested in making sure that there was greater clarity and access to adoption information for access to genetic disease information, hereditary genetic disease information. Obviously, as a doctor that was very close to his heart. Looking back through some of the old *Hansard* debates around adoption, I noted that the esteemed colleague who stood in my place prior to my election really put forward that that was an issue he cared about. I'm happy to see that there do seem to be some changes in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act that do allow for greater sharing of information about an adopted person for the purposes of tracing or tracking or connecting issues related to genetic and hereditary disease. I'm sure Dr. Turner will be happy to hear that.

However, I also have to go back to – Mr. Speaker, we've had some discussion and debate in this Legislature about adoption. We had a motion brought forward by the Member for Spruce Grove-

Stony Plain that spoke in a very heartfelt way about the challenges his family faced in the process to adopt a child. It echoed comments that I have heard . . .

The Acting Speaker: Sorry, Member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. My colleague was in full flight, and I want to give her the opportunity to complete her thoughts.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Go ahead, Member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I was actually in midsentence, I believe, which is not uncommon for me.

I have heard from many constituents in my riding who are concerned about the delays – and, you know, maybe for good reason – but it can be very discouraging and disheartening to wait so long to adopt a child when you’ve committed your heart to do so. I was disappointed – and I’d be interested to hear from the government side, maybe particularly from the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. I actually note that he did comment on this bill already and provided his feedback.

I don’t see substantive changes that would speed up the adoption process within Bill 48. In some respects it’s classic red tape. It really, really is. Yet I don’t see anything that actually makes that process that much faster. There is a small detail about when a minister conducts or may conduct an investigation. When an adoption application is filed, instead of having to serve an applicant with a copy of their investigation report, they only have to provide it now. Rather than sending it by registered mail, they can now send it by e-mail, I suppose, which I guess is something. It just does not seem to really make a big difference in the lives of those families who are seeking to adopt or those children who are looking to be placed in a loving home. I would not be satisfied in terms of red tape reduction if I was an adoptive parent who’s been in the process for years and seeing that. I don’t know how that substantively speeds up the process.

I also have some questions about – and I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Manning has raised this as well. You know, we want to be clear, especially when we’re talking about the adoption of a child that might have been subject to a permanent guardianship order, that all parties to that process do have access to the appropriate information, are served with the appropriate information. There are incredible sensitivities around taking a child in a permanent guardianship order, which means they’ve been removed from their family, and adopting them out to another family. We know that there is a long track record of that being done often without the consent or proper knowledge of families, particularly extended family members, the fact that a child has been permanently adopted into a new family, especially when we’re talking about families that may be disadvantaged, that may not have the access to the processes and the information.

We have to be clear that when we’re talking about child intervention and children in care, there are often remarkable power imbalances between the families that are involved in that process and those who can make decisions and have the authority to make decisions under this act. So I would like some clarification from the minister about certainty that this is not going to make it easier for families to have children, whether they be part of their extended family, placed in adopted situations, with adoptive families, without their proper knowledge and information. When we lessen the requirements for notification, my fear and concern is that there are family members who are not going to know. We don’t have a great

track record with respect to that, Mr. Speaker, in this province, so I want to be very clear that this is not going to disadvantage those families’ knowledge when one of their family members has been placed in a permanent adopted home.

I know that I will have a chance, Mr. Speaker, to speak to Bill 48 at further opportunity. I do want to note that I do support the idea of greater disclosure, and there do seem to be some provisions in here which allow for greater access to adoption records. We know that that’s very important for people to understand who they are, where they came from, who their family is, particularly when we’re talking about indigenous families. But whenever we’re talking about disclosure of deeply personal information, I’m always cautious about protection of privacy as well. It’s funny. In the last two days I’ve had the opportunity to speak a number of times about deeply personal information, whether it be health information and now in this case adoption records. That can be very disruptive, but it could also be very important for families to know where they come from. I want some assurances that while we’re providing greater access to adoption records to a broader scope of family members, we’re balancing that as well with appropriate safeguards and privacy protections, simply to make sure that information is not shared inappropriately.

Mr. Speaker, I think that I will have an opportunity – there are more comments I have to make about these amendments in Bill 48 to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, particularly around adoption, but given what I know is probably a limited amount of time, I will wrap up my comments there.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 48? I’ll recognize the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate on Bill 48.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:30 **Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Thank you, members. I’d like to call the committee to order.

Bill 37 Builders’ Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? We are on the main bill. I’ll recognize the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 37, my first opportunity to do so in the Assembly. It’s an interesting bill to look at. It reminds me of years previous. Before I had the honour of being elected, I worked as a taxpayer services agent for the Canada Revenue Agency. I suppose members of government might look and say: oh, that’s incredibly appropriate for a member of the NDP. Let’s be clear. I was working, actually, as a taxpayer services agent for the business inquiries tax centre over at Canada Place. My job actually was to help businesspeople, to help them understand the intricacies, I guess, of corporate tax, of working with GST, working with payroll, to help them with sorting out their accounts and indeed try to help them

avoid getting penalties and try to assist them. I was working for the Canada Revenue Agency on the side of the angels, if I may say.

I enjoyed that work quite a bit, Mr. Chair. It was, in fact, probably some of the best training, quite literally, that I had for the job that I hold today because often when people call in, of course, about tax issues, they're generally not going to be in a good mood, so I got a lot of experience in learning how to listen to people, how to de-escalate, and indeed how to explain complex ideas and policies and procedures in simple terms. As I said, it was a fantastic training ground for the job I hold today and helping individuals solve problems, helping them sort out issues and indeed, at times, try to navigate red tape. Of course, that was the previous bill, but still.

Now, in doing that, a large portion of that work was often talking with young tradespeople. We know that in the construction industry – or at least this is where I learned this about the construction industry – it's largely, almost completely built on contracting. Everybody, from the guy that pushes a broom and picks up the nails and scrap wood that are left over up to the guys doing the finish carpeting and the roofing and everything else: they are all individual contractors. I'd often speak with young tradespeople who had run into the situation where they'd been required to get a GST number in order to get their cheque, but it hadn't been properly explained how the GST system works, helping them sort that out, and oftentimes being in arrears because they didn't realize they had to be reporting and filing. It's a complex system, Mr. Chair, but it is the way the construction industry is built.

Indeed, on more than one occasion I spoke with tradespeople who were struggling with the challenges of getting paid. I recall speaking to some who, yeah, often found themselves in the position of being the third or fourth contractor in a chain of contractors and being left unpaid for work that they had done. That's a challenging position. I know it's not one that's just native to the construction industry. I know a lot of people that work in the ever-growing gig economy who work as contractors, whether they're writers or graphic designers or whether they're doing IT or tech work, various types of design, who are left at the mercy of those that they contract with. I know the incredible challenge that can be when they can go for weeks, months waiting to be paid for work that they have already done while still paying their own costs, while still having their life expenses. Indeed, we know this has been an issue in the construction industry.

So I appreciate that this legislation has been brought forward to address this situation. This is important. It needs to be done because indeed if someone is doing the work, then they should be paid, and they should be paid promptly. It makes sense to bring forward legislation that would help protect them. Now, as I said, this is not an issue that's solely contained within the construction industry, but we know this is a significant industry and certainly a major one in the province of Alberta that affects a wide range of people, so it does make sense that perhaps we begin here. Perhaps at some point we will see the government look at taking other steps towards protecting others who are working in this situation in other parts of the gig economy. But for the meantime this does seem to be a step in the right direction.

Now, it does bring to mind some questions for me, Mr. Chair, when I consider that this same government, who is at least understanding this part of the importance of ensuring that people are paid on time for the work they have done and recognizing that the lack of that payment in due time, in a reasonable time frame, indeed can have a significant economic impact on those individuals or those companies, those contractors, is a government that passed Bill 32.

In Bill 32 they took the provision that employees must receive their final pay within three or 10 days after their last day of employment, the same principle, Mr. Chair, that someone who has done

the work deserves to be paid in a reasonable time frame – that's what the law provided. That's what this government is providing for people in the construction industry here, but for every other Albertan who works as an employee, they took that three-to-10-day period and changed it now to 10 consecutive days after the end of the pay period in which they were terminated or as much as 31 consecutive days after the last day of their employment.

On the one hand we have a government that is recognizing, rightfully so, that folks in the construction industry should be paid within a reasonable time frame, that there should not be delays, that the person who is paying them should not be taking advantage to save money themselves or make more profit themselves by delaying the payment that is owed to an individual who has done the work and earned that pay. But on the other hand, they're turning to all other employees in the province of Alberta and saying: it is too much of a burden for your employer when they terminate you at the end of your contract. As we were talking about, when we have someone who has finished their construction contract and looking to be paid, "When you finish your contract as an employee, it is more important that your employer be able to save a bit of money, be able to extract a little bit of extra profit than you as an individual be able to pay your bills, you as an individual be paid promptly for work that you have already completed," there is a word for that, Mr. Chair. That word is "hypocrisy."

It is disappointing to see that this government fails to understand that both employees of an employer and a contractor who is self-employed work equally hard, are equally valuable, make equal contributions to the economy, and are equally deserving of fair treatment. Certainly, this is a government that has some odd ideas about the value of workers. As we talk about – again, we are talking here in Bill 37 about prompt payment and about the value of work and recognizing that because of that value, the people doing that work deserve to be respected and paid promptly. Yet we have the Minister of Finance today coming out with his fiscal update and telling us that anybody that works in the public sector is, in fact, a parasite on the economy, that they are of less value than someone working in private industry, that they contribute nothing to the economy, that all they do is extract tax dollars or cause costs for future taxpayers.

4:40

So it is no surprise, perhaps, that while this is government is taking good steps here to support people who have done the work and have contributed their value being paid promptly, being treated reasonably and fairly and respected for the work they have done, they cannot somehow extend that same respect to people who work as employees in the private sector or apparently anybody who does any work in the public sector. It speaks very clearly to what this government's values are, and I suppose it probably speaks pretty clearly to what we can expect in further legislation that comes before this House. I certainly look forward to speaking to Bill 47, which demonstrates even further this government's lack of respect, bordering at times on contempt, for people who work as employees, for people who work as workers in this province, and their view, it seems, that the only way for our economy to succeed, the only way for our province to move forward is for every one of those individuals to accept less, that they are the problem that is holding us back.

It is a point on which I fundamentally disagree, Mr. Chair, though I support what they are doing here with this legislation, generally speaking, in that it speaks to the fundamental principles that when somebody does the work, when they have earned the dollars, they should be paid those dollars, they should be treated with the respect that is due to them for completing the work that they have been contracted to do, and that be provided promptly.

Now, I know that some members across have been looking at me with looks of puzzlement as I've been speaking. I recognize that this is perhaps a puzzling concept to them. They like to have that very hierarchical view of who is of value in our economy and who is not and who they view as having pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, as it were, again an area where we have some fundamental differences of opinion. But I can tell you that on this side of the House we have respect. Amongst the Official Opposition we have respect for everybody at every level of the economy and the contributions that they all make. We don't consider corporations more deserving of a corporate handout than individuals getting prompt payment on their final pay. We recognize that we have an interlocking system in our economy, where all individuals deserve to be paid respect and treated well.

Members were looking at me with some confusion when I was talking about the comments of the Finance minister from earlier today, so as I am talking about this bill, when we are looking at prompt payment, respectful treatment of people who have earned their pay within the construction industry, I think it would be perhaps worth while noting the precise comments that puzzled the members opposite so much. He said: while the public sector plays a key role in delivering public services, it does not create jobs or generate wealth; rather, public-sector activities and spending are paid by withdrawing money from the economy through taxes or taking money from future taxpayers by borrowing for deficit financing. That is the view this government has of every single person who works in the public sector: they are a burden, they are a drain, they are lesser than anyone that works in the private sector. That is what we see in the legislation they bring forward. That is certainly what we hear in the rhetoric that comes forward from these members, and it is something, again, which I and my colleagues fundamentally disagree with.

Now, the members may chafe at hearing their philosophy put so succinctly or hearing what the actual impact is of the ideology that they hold, as demonstrated in their own legislation. They have done it repeatedly, Mr. Chair. It is what we repeatedly see them do in this House. This is how we have seen them treat health care workers in the midst of this global pandemic, as cannon fodder at times. This is how we've seen them treat education workers, the nearly 20,000 that they kicked off the books in the middle of a global pandemic after promising they would not make such changes. They can mouth words of respect, but their actions speak utterly differently.

This legislation that we have here in front of us, Bill 37: again, I support this because I support treating people with respect when they have done the work that they have done, when they have contributed the value they contribute, as all employees – public or private sector, in the construction industry or in the health care industry, whether they are building a home or washing the soiled sheets of a COVID patient – are deserving of respect. That is a principle I will continue to defend as a member of the Alberta NDP caucus, as the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre, as the Official Opposition critic for Health.

At this point I see no reason I would not support Bill 37, but certainly as we debate these bills, and certainly as we debate other legislation, I will continue to come back to this principle. The respect that is being brought forward in this bill and is being afforded to contractors who work in the construction industry should be the same respect that is afforded to every other worker, every employee, public or private sector, within the province of Alberta. That is a principle that all of my colleagues on this side of the aisle in the Official Opposition will continue to stand and to fight for.

Now, to be clear, at times we've heard members of the government say that this is the first time that this has been done in the province of Alberta. I want it to be clear; our government introduced the first prompt-payment clauses within government

contracts in 2016. At that time Brian Mason who was then the Minister of Infrastructure took steps, on government contracts, at least, to ensure that subcontractors had recourse to be paid. They began with a 1-800 number that they could call if they were not receiving payments so that we could work through that system, then, through to the higher contractors to find out why those payments to the subcontractors were not getting through. While we were in government, certainly many stakeholders asked us to conduct a review on prompt payment for all contracts, and we started those discussions. Those began while we were in government. That was actually an issue on which we campaigned in 2019.

My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the opposition critic for Transportation, indeed I know that it was something that he was passionate about, and he had, in fact, in the fall of last year brought forward a motion on the Order Paper that said:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to commission a third-party review of existing legislation that impacts the construction industry to address the issue of delayed payments to ensure prompt payment to businesses, contractors, and suppliers in the construction industry.

Now, unfortunately, that motion did not have the opportunity to come forward for debate, but our commitment and our support for prompt payment has been there from the beginning and I think has been quite clear.

I appreciate the opportunity to debate Bill 37. I appreciate the government taking this step forward in terms of respect for working people in the province of Alberta, and I look forward to continuing to press for that for all working people in Alberta in future legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:50

Chair's Ruling Allegations against a Member

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Members, just before we carry on, I'd just like to caution. The previous speaker came very, very close to being called to order under 23(h), "Makes allegations against another Member," for comments made regarding the Minister of Finance. I'll have to review *Hansard* to see exactly what you said, but I believe you said that the Minister of Finance called public-sector workers parasites. Now, if he did say that and you can provide that quote and possibly table it in the House, I would expect that. If not, then at your first opportunity apologizing for that statement would be in order.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will acknowledge that that would not be a direct quote of the words from the Minister of Finance but rather my paraphrasing thereof. For that reason, I will apologize and withdraw.

Debate Continued

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 37? I'll recognize the Member for . . .

Member Ceci: Somewhere.

The Acting Chair: Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: I've been all over the province today in terms of my title.

I want to take some time to also stand up and address this bill before us, Bill 37, builders' lien, 2020. You know, my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre talked about some things that I'm very happy about and proud of, that back in 2016 there was movement by then Minister of Infrastructure, Minister Brian Mason, to work across government to ensure that prompt payment of government contracts to contractors and others was done expeditiously and people didn't have to wait on the province of Alberta to pay its bills. There's nothing that is more problematic than work being done and contractors or workers waiting and waiting and waiting for payment. The initiation of what now is codified in Bill 37 by the former Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transportation at the time, Minister Mason, is something that we continued on, not unlike the city of Calgary, when we initiated what we called the SEEP policy, which was the sustainable environmental and ethical procurement process.

It first started out as a notice of motion, of course, and had administration bring back reports on how the procurement of goods and services that were environmentally sustainable, ethically sourced, how that really helped push others within the context of the city of Calgary to do the same things, other businesses, other individuals. It kind of became something people wanted to do once they saw how it could be done. That was something I was proud to be a participant in, creating the notice of motion to get it started and then also, through the committee process at the city of Calgary, refining that work over time and then seeing the city bring in, through the purchase of its goods and procurement of services, that policy.

You know, if you're buying hundreds of millions of dollars of goods and services, you have some power, and you have some responsibility. What the minister of the time, Brian Mason, did was recognize that we at the province of Alberta were the – we invested in hundreds and hundreds, probably billions, of goods and services through our capital plan and other kinds of things, and we wanted those monies to make a difference. Now we see Bill 37 before us, and, of course, it speaks to this important move to ensure that contractors and workers are paid on time. We put that into our 2019 campaign strategy, and I'm glad that this government has continued on that work, especially to help workers and those in the construction industry to be paid on time, because of the flagrant misuse of payment schedules in that industry.

This is something I come to personally knowing, not by being a contractor or being a worker in the construction industry but by, you know, my father being in the construction industry, first as a worker for others and then kind of graduating or with experience and time starting his own companies and hiring people to work for him and working for developers and individuals who wanted to purchase homes. Of course, this goes back 40, 50 years, but I know that this issue caused a significant amount of stress in the home that I was raised in. I can remember repeatedly my father coming home, and my mother, who did the books for his company, saying: where's the payment for the work that you did for this person or that company or this other individual? Sometimes that would cause a great deal of stress because he was unable to provide the payment. He wasn't given the payment, and he would have to go back and try and negotiate with those people who weren't paying him. Had this sort of thing been in law in Ontario 50 years ago, there would have been a lot fewer difficulties between my parents, a lot less stress in the household, not that we didn't get through it all, but it would have helped out.

I understand, from reviewing the information about this bill, that it mirrors some of the things that have gone on in Ontario with regard to their introduction of prompt payment legislation as well. I want to congratulate the colleague who just spoke before me for going

through this bill and summarizing it in such a complete and helpful way. You know, establishing a 28-day period where all payments must be made: that helps. That is different than Ontario, but it certainly helps individuals involved in particularly the construction industry and those who are subcontractors to contractors.

There are a few concerns that I can see with regard to the adjudication process that's also mentioned in this bill. That process is left up to regulation to codify. I think people would rightly say, you know: what is that going to look like? Obviously, we don't have that information at this point in time. It probably would have been more clear had it been up front and put in this bill so that all those essentially signing on to support this bill would have a greater understanding of how that adjudication process will unfold.

I also like the removal of pay-when-paid clauses. That is something that I heard as a young kid growing up, my father saying that he was going to get paid when other people got paid. That, of course, is something that was a source of stress.

I am going to take my seat. I'm going to consider myself a supporter of this bill and recognize that its genesis was work that started in 2016 and continues to this day. I think it'll benefit Albertans, particularly those involved with the construction industry.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 37?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 37, the Builders' Lien (Prompt Payment) Amendment Act, 2020?

Hon. Members: Yes.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 37 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

5:00

Bill 39

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

The Acting Chair: I believe the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud still has about eight minutes left.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise again to speak to the government amendment – I apologize; I don't remember the name of the amendment; I'm guessing amendment 1 – which was proposed by the Member for Calgary-Klein, which proposed changes to the stop order provision set out in the Child Care Licensing Act in Bill 39. Specifically, the proposed government amendment added some authority for a stop order to be issued specifically when "an imminent threat to the health, safety or welfare of the children to whom the person is offering or providing child care exists." This is in addition to right now, which is that the only grounds for which a stop order can be issued to an unlicensed child care provider – and unlicensed, again, to emphasize is a child care provider who is providing care to children but is not subject to any regulation, oversight, restrictions under any legislation. Currently under Bill 39 and the Child Care Licensing Act an unlicensed child care provider may only be the subject of investigation and have a stop order issued against them if they are providing care to more children than they're permitted to under the

legislation. This proposed government amendment expands that to allow for a stop order to be issued where there's an imminent threat to the health, safety, or welfare of the child.

As I indicated in my comments last night, Mr. Chair, I am very much supportive of the idea behind the government amendment to expand the circumstances under which a stop order can be issued. We have, unfortunately, many examples in Alberta but, of course, even across the country of situations where children have been placed at risk, children have been injured, and sadly children have even lost their lives in unlicensed child care settings. Additional abilities to investigate and also to issue stop orders against that is critical.

I do appreciate this government amendment being brought forward. However, I would like to table a subamendment to this government amendment, Mr. Chair. I will provide you with the copies.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member. This will be referred to as subamendment SA1.

Any member wishing for a copy could please put up their hand for the pages.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Chair, would you like me to read it into the record?

The Acting Chair: As soon as I have a copy of it, please. Thank you.

Go ahead, Member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The subamendment reads that I move that amendment A1 to Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended in clause (a) in the proposed section 23 (a) by striking out the proposed subsection (1)(a) and substituting the following:

- (a) by offering or providing the child care, the person is contravening section 3 or 18.1, or

by striking out "imminent" in the proposed subsections 1(b) and (1.1) wherever it occurs.

Of course, that's a very technical description of the amendment. What it means, Mr. Chair, is that it's clarifying the circumstances under which a stop order can be issued. It references section 3 and section 18.1 of the act. Those are the sections that describe the numbers, the limits of children that can be cared for in unlicensed and licensed family day home programs. Simply, we're trying to capture both unlicensed and family day home programs, saying that a stop order can be issued when a child care provider is providing care to too many children in both of those settings. That's the purpose of that amendment.

Then, Mr. Chair, by striking out the word "imminent" – I want to clarify this. I spoke to this last night a little bit. The reason why I'm suggesting that we strike out the word "imminent" is that "imminent" has what can be known as a temporal quality to it. It means that the threat to the child – the health, safety, or welfare – must be immediately imminent. It must be just about to happen. It's a time and place issue rather than the quality or the context of the threat to the child and welfare. So it means that a stop order can only be issued if the threat is just about to happen to that child, that the risk, the harm, the danger to the child is just about to happen. In my view, I believe that that's a little bit too prescriptive.

I believe that the current wording, as proposed in the government amendment, says that a stop order can only be issued if there are reasonable grounds, and I believe that allows for judgment. The statutory director has to have reasonable grounds, which would be based on information they've gathered. I've also commented last night that I believe that a corresponding amendment needs to be made to section 22 of the act, which allows for an investigation

where there is a concern that there is a threat to the health, safety, or welfare of a child. It is not within my ability as an opposition member to propose such an amendment as that's not a section that is the subject of the amendment from the government today, so I can't propose that amendment. However, I'm hopeful that that amendment will be coming forward to allow for the investigation to occur in order for the stop order to be issued.

"Imminent," in my view, would not capture some of the circumstances in which we have seen children who have been placed in danger and have been hurt, injured, and even lost their lives. And I want to draw attention to an incident that arose very recently, three weeks ago. It was an unlicensed child care setting where five children were left unattended by the unlicensed child care provider. There were infants to age five. They were left alone for an hour. The only reason that this came to light was that a five-year-old managed to squeeze open a door and go to their neighbour's house next door and contact an adult to say that they'd been left unattended.

I don't believe that would be captured by this. I believe that's the kind of conduct we would want to prevent from happening, but with this ability as the way it's drafted, with "imminent," we would not be able to do that because we would not know that the danger had happened until it had already taken place. This only would prevent a threat to a child if we knew it was about to happen.

Similarly, I would add another actually not hypothetical situation, where an unlicensed child care setting might have somebody in the home who has a dangerous criminal conviction, perhaps, or even a registered sex offender. There's no regulation of who can be in a home in an unlicensed setting, so there would be no way in the current regulations and act to prevent that. That's not an imminent threat, but I think we could all agree that there would be significant risk of harm to a child in that setting.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is that "imminent" is a point in time when we know that there are very real threats to the safety and health of children that are not just a point in time. We know there are risks that can take place that we need to be able to stop, and I believe that's the intent of this amendment, to be able to issue a stop order in those circumstances.

I agree that we need to have some criteria around a threat to a child and how that's determined. I believe that discretion is built right into the government amendment, which talks about the requirement for reasonable grounds. If an amendment is brought forward that also allows for an investigation to take place, that would be the basis for the reasonable grounds to say that a stop order should be issued; therefore, I believe this is a reasonable amendment that meets the government's intent to prevent a threat to the health and safety and welfare of the children.

I deeply hope, Mr. Chair, that the government will consider this amendment in the thoughtful way it's presented to actually achieve an amendment that will make unlicensed child care safer for children.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to subamendment SA1? I will recognize the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to once again stand to rise and speak to Bill 39, the early learning and child care licensing act. First of all, I just want to once again thank all of the Albertans who took the time to really, truly provide feedback on this act throughout the consultations that we undertook over the last number of months. I recognize that it's been a difficult number of months, yet Albertans – child care operators, educators, and

parents – thought that it was important enough to move forward at this time.

As I've said before and will continue to say, this was the first time in over a decade that this government consulted this broadly with child care operators, educators, and parents right across Alberta. These consultations gathered feedback from almost 10,000 Albertans that either work in or have an interest in child care. Now, I've heard a lot from the members opposite, and I do want to say that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview suggested in debate that our consultations were ill timed. The reality is that the consultations occurred when child care operators need it the most.

5:10

We did what they never did, Mr. Chair. We asked for the input of Albertans. We polled the operators and educators in child care, out of school care, preschool, and family day homes during one of our seven town halls, and they overwhelmingly chose to proceed with these consultations, and they chose the time frame. We've heard from countless operators like Nasib Ranu, the executive director of Rainbow Daycare in Edmonton, who appreciated our efforts. She said, quote, we've not felt this listened to since Premier Klein; Minister Schulz and this government have been a game changer; we finally have a voice again. Work on this legislation has been a collaboration – a true collaboration – between government and the child care sector.

As I stated during the second reading of this bill, amendments in the act centre on quality child care, protecting the health and safety of children, increased transparency for parents but also accessibility, flexibility, reducing red tape, and providing better guidance, support, and information for parents when they're making these hugely important decisions for their families. With the help of my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs it was clear that, through thoughtful decision-making, we could in fact improve the overall safety and quality of child care across Alberta.

It is unfortunate, although not necessarily unexpected, that the members opposite are politicizing this legislation, which has become a pattern in this House, Mr. Chair. It is unfortunate because I truly believe these changes have nothing to do with ideology and are simply about ensuring that children, families, early childhood educators, and centre directors have the best possible legislation as well as guiding documents available to guide child care in Alberta.

The members opposite have also asked why we're updating this legislation. I know the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs wanted to know what prompted this piece of legislation and who was asking for these changes. The Member for Edmonton-Decore, who was curious about reducing red tape: how can you reduce red tape in child care? Well, Mr. Chair, we are doing this because the current legislation was about to expire, but it was also one of the top things that our government heard through the red tape reduction portal online over the last number of months. Again, most importantly, it is what operators, educators, and parents across this province asked us to do.

Mr. Chair, we also spoke with front-line workers, workers like Roberta Rossow, who has been a licensing officer for over 15 years, I believe. She says, quote, I feel that the consultations provided programs and licensing staff with the opportunity to provide meaningful feedback and that as we move forward, we continue to learn from our experiences. Program staff and licence holders feel valued when these consultations occur and become motivated in new and exciting ways.

Mr. Chair, this was the idea of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. This was based on the feedback that she heard from operators, saying that sometimes there was inconsistency or subjectivity and that there was really a way for us to make meaningful changes to

close those loops, which, you know, reduces that subjectivity in how the act would be interpreted.

Mr. Chair, we also hear a lot about claims about affordability. The members opposite believe that this legislation does not address affordability, yet I have heard members opposite say that they do understand that there are a number of ways that we address issues when it comes to any ministry, for that matter, that there is legislation, there is regulation, there is policy, there are programs, and then there are government and taxpayer dollars being invested into these programs. All of these different pieces have a role in our approach to quality, affordable, and accessible child care.

Access to child care has always been a hugely important priority for Alberta's government but even more so over the last couple of months, when we've seen the impacts of this pandemic and the importance of child care to Albertans. That's why it's a hugely important part of our recovery plan, but it's also why we've invested nearly \$100 million in funding, to ensure that child care centres could continue to meet the needs of families. As of today we've seen 97 per cent of centres open in the province, but, unlike the members opposite, we're not interested in one size fits all, not our ideology or our ideas are the best ideas; we've really, truly left this to those who are experts. We won't entrench a billion-dollar program that less than 1 in 7 parents would use. Instead, we're making long-term, sustainable, and substantive changes to the system to ensure that high-quality child care is available and affordable.

In fact, you know, Mr. Chair – I know the members opposite want to talk a lot about \$25-a-day daycare – here in Alberta right now we now, in fact, have \$13-a-day daycare for those parents who are most in need, and the best part about that is that it is in the centre of the parent's choice because we do believe – and as a parent of two young children I have made multiple decisions about child care for my children, and I truly do believe that parents are in the best position to make that choice for their families.

When we look at things like red tape, you know, I know there was some confusion about that, and I want to explain what we heard from an operator in St. Albert. SIGIS child care centre had said on the day that we announced these changes that an example of red tape for them was digital records. It sounds like something that we should just be doing in 2020 anyways, but for these operators it's printing, it's paper.

They were also procuring and paying for storage facilities for all of these printed records that they were never going to look at or use. Allowing them to keep that digitally: it's simple. I know. Red tape kind of almost sounds like a bit of a cliché, but they're true, meaningful, substantive changes that then allow those operators to spend that time and those dollars supporting front-line early childhood educators and parents and kids, which is really, truly what this is all about.

Mr. Chair, let's move to the incredibly important tenet of quality child care. The opposition claims that this legislation doesn't provide for the standards of early learning in licensed child care centres and doesn't place children at the centre of this legislation. That, like many of the things we've heard today and, well, every single day we're in here, is simply just not true. Throughout the legislation you'll see the commitment to quality through guiding principles and matters to be considered. They're not empty words; they're not. These principles are based on the useful elements of the previous accreditation model that emphasize the importance of quality child care. They entrench values of safety, quality, well-being, inclusion, and child development right into this act, which is very similar to what members opposite did when they were updating the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

Feedback from operators specified that these values were great but that the process was burdensome and time-consuming. The agency co-ordinator for Northalta Family Day Care Service said that, quote: the theory and principles of accreditation were valuable, absolutely; however, the process of accreditation could be challenging; I am pleased to see the amendments to the Child Care Licensing Act will embed standards of accreditation such as child care staff, family, community, and diversity into these guiding principles.

With this new legislation, programs will have to demonstrate how they're following the guiding principles and matters to be considered when they submit their program plan, and that is absolutely a requirement of the licensing process. Again, we're just taking the best pieces from that former accreditation.

I do know that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is not happy about these improvements. She has said time and time again that quality is compromised. I mean, we looked into it. You know, once we heard these criticisms of centres across the province, we did look into it. I can name a number of excellent child care centres in the riding of Edmonton-Whitemud, and I can tell you that they have excellent compliance records and great track records even after the accreditation program was cancelled. I would definitely appeal to the member opposite and say: if there really are true concerns of safety, call, reach out, and we will look into it, like we do with every other case that comes to our office.

On top of that, obviously, we've also – and I've spoken about this as well – made investments to ensure that the flight curriculum is available across the province. We know that this is important. We don't want to tell operators what they must do, but we do want to make this available.

I also again want to say that during consultations the number one thing that we heard that has the biggest impact on quality is, in fact, highly trained, educated front-line early childhood educators, which we continue to invest in through wage top-ups for child care workers.

Now, I also want to address safety because I think that this is a really important piece, especially as we get into some of the amendments that we are discussing today. You know, no matter what side of the House we're on, Mr. Chair, I do believe that we agree that the safety of children is the number one priority, not only for me but this ministry and, I would argue or guess, the members opposite.

This was put into sharp focus by the tragic death of Mackenzy Woolfsmith and the public fatality inquiry that followed. You know, Mr. Chair, as a parent myself I do remember the first time I heard that story. My daughter was around the same age. I honestly can't imagine what the Woolfsmith family has gone through, and I truly do commend them on their continued advocacy in Mackenzy's name. I think that that's hugely important, and it is something that I very much admire and take very seriously.

I met with Mrs. Woolfsmith, Mackenzy's mother, and I'll be honest that that meeting began with me in tears because I really, truly just couldn't imagine what she had been through. We had an open and honest and very productive meeting. I again want to thank her for her passion, her ideas, and her solutions, specifically on how we can continue to improve the safety of kids that falls outside the scope of this legislation. These meetings are only the beginning of this very important work. I truly do believe that and am committed to that, and I do believe that we have other changes that can be made outside this legislation as we continue these very important discussions together.

5:20

Mr. Chair, I do also want to say, as has been referenced, that we reviewed the recommendations from the inquiry, and I want to

share with you some of the changes we're making as a result. First, the risk-based licensing approach in licensed child care centres, which is what we license, right? The legislation is the parameters for things that would be licensed under that legislation. The risk-based model is exactly the recommendation that came out of that. It will enable licensing staff to spend more time with programs that need assistance to really adhere to those safety and quality parameters and less time with those centres that are doing an excellent job and are high-compliance centres.

Heather Gomme, director of It's a Child's World Family Day Home Agency, said, quote: this shift to a risk-based licensing approach is a great change for the child care sector because it will allow licensing staff to focus valuable time and resources on programs that truly need help; this will in turn create safer environments for children to be in and enable high-functioning programs to continue delivering high-quality programming.

Mr. Chair, we can all agree that when parents have access to more information, they will also make better decisions for their children. In early 2021 there will also be improved resources, including an online tool kit for parents to use when making decisions about their child's care. We've also included a tool kit for operators in unlicensed child care to outline the supports that they can access. This is difficult work, especially if they may be in, for example, an unlicensed day home and perhaps don't have that network built in. They have a place to go to access mental health resources and other resources around quality and safety.

Again, you know, one of the pieces that we heard from organizations like Embolden, who I also spoke with as well as Mrs. Woolfsmith – we're committed to working with organizations like Embolden. This is a private day home community. They felt really strongly that the best place for this isn't necessarily government. Government legislation covers licensed child care. They have a lot of ideas and a network on how they can provide that service to other day homes that are operating just like them. This is a network that provides these resources and support to help guide parents but also providers, and I think that that's hugely important. We're going to continue that work as well.

Additionally, to address transparency and access to information, parents who choose unlicensed care will also be able to call into the ministry to find out if a provider has been issued a stop order within the last 24 months. This, again, becomes very important as we speak to the amendment and the subamendment that we are discussing here today in committee. They will also be told if Children's Services has referred a matter involving a private day home to law enforcement.

I do want to thank the Member for Calgary-Klein for making this amendment to give us some additional scope to ensure that if there are concerns that would fall under criminal acts or, again, be referred to law enforcement, the operator couldn't operate in the meantime. It kind of closes the gap, and it does address what we heard a couple of weeks ago in the instance that the member opposite referenced. Law enforcement was fuzzy, to be quite honest. There was a gap in terms of them recognizing that that was their role. I truly do think that the amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Klein seeks to address that, to say: look, we can issue a stop order if there is more than the number of allowable children in care or if there is this risk. In the interim, while that risk is being addressed by the appropriate law enforcement agencies that these issues would fall under, that operator cannot continue to provide care.

Mr. Chair, it is a parent's right to choose the type of child care that works best for their family, and tens of thousands of parents make this choice every day. What we are doing is committing real

resources to support parents through that process of choice but also operators in these additional supports that they may access.

I do know that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud does remind this House on a weekly basis that in her previous experience as a lawyer who also drafts legislation, she does know that including unlicensed child care professional standards into regulations in this act would then make it licensed. We can't license something that by its very nature is not licensed and then, again, not enforceable. The member would know that that's just not good legislation. We're not about to go tell grandparents who are taking care of their grandchildren that that is not legal or allowable under our legislation. That's just not something that is common sense. It's not something that we were asked to do.

But unlike the previous government, we're not just going to ignore the role that unlicensed private day homes play. We are asking them, "Come; if you have ideas, you have a seat at this table," because unlike the members opposite, you know, this isn't about ideology. This is about practical solutions for parents and families. We take the safety and quality aspects of this hugely. It's one of our major priorities.

We also took the additional step of tracking licences. Before, an educator in a serious incident: that might be an infraction or a noncompliance for a centre. But now we are able to link that or, you know, revoke or pull a licence. So we have done a variety of things through a variety of avenues to address many of these points in this inquiry report.

Mr. Chair, in addition to this legislation, we will have accompanying regulations and changes in policy to reflect these shifts. That includes greater flexibility to include supervisors in ratio; expanding the use of accessible outdoor space like parks; allowing for use of one-time consent forms for regularly occurring off-site activities; allowing for overnight care, which is something that we have heard a lot about; allowing for mixed age groups; clarifying and modernizing the language that's used right within the act; and then, as I said, allowing staff certifications to be cancelled, suspended, or approved with terms and conditions.

Before I conclude, I do want to say that I'm really proud of the work that the ministry has done in pulling this together, and I'm grateful for the work that the MLA for Grande Prairie and Minister of Municipal Affairs undertook in these consultations. This will create more certainty for new child care centres to become licensed. We've levelled the playing field to hopefully encourage – you know, if the parameters were a barrier for unlicensed day homes to come into the licensing act, we have removed that barrier of inequity in ratios. I do want to say that many of us in this House have used multiple forms of child care for our own children, and I think that's fairly representative of what we see in the Alberta public.

Again, I am very, very grateful to the Member for Calgary-Klein for introducing his amendment. I do think that this is important, and I think that this does close a gap that was identified.

However, I also looked into subamendment SA1, as I think is our job. I am open to ideas, amendments from both sides of this House. The ministry has provided some feedback that that amendment is just too broad. It really doesn't have any substantive impact. You know, if we just give carte blanche oversight for investigations, we might as well be licensing, and that is already addressed within this act.

While I do appreciate the work done on the subamendment, I do hope that members will support the amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Klein but not support that very specific language brought forward in subamendment SA1.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to subamendment SA1? I will recognize the Member for Parkland – for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: It's okay, Mr. Chair. We've been moving around from spot to spot, and I find myself struggling a bit, too, being back here and trying to figure out where everyone is sitting. You're never at your same desk, it seems, these days, so the placemat isn't where it is, et cetera, et cetera.

Firstly, I want to thank I want to say the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for bringing this forward. I had an opportunity about a year ago at a Diwali festival to actually spend some time with the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Actually, I got a chance to have supper with her mom, a very lovely lady. Please extend my regards to her. I had the honour, actually, at that event to light the lamps with the priest on the stage. It was pretty moving. So there are some genuine things that we do share across the aisle here despite some of the rhetoric that might be thrown back and forth.

Myself, I have four kids. My wife is a working professional, and we honestly had to go through the gamut as well. You know, Mr. Chair, through you to some of the members opposite, you up in that Cold Lake country understand what a 10-to-4 shift looks like when you're the dad working away from home, or a 6-to-1 shift, or picking up your little suitcase and bouncing from one part of the country to the other and travelling to the States sometimes and over in Europe to try to do what we do in our business.

Now, my wife, arguably, is the mama bear. She's the rock. She takes care of everything. She has, unfortunately, all the negative impacts of being a wife that's married to a husband who works on the road a lot, and she has to carry on her practice and deal with that plus take care of our kids. When we were young professionals, married, and we started our family, we kind of got into that with eyes wide open, and we literally, as the minister has so eloquently stated, have gone through pretty much every gamut. You know, at first when we had our son, our oldest, my wife was still travelling, commuting up to Athabasca. We lived in Spruce Grove. Her mom actually retired. She was a nurse. We actually got her to retire a couple of years early for us and take care of my son, so that was probably one of the best things. I mean, we remunerated her for her services and everything else, but that was a contract between family, et cetera. With our little guy we felt pretty safe, and my wife was afforded that luxury and peace of mind of commuting, doing her job, taking care of her patients, and then coming back and scooting up to the little guy.

5:30

Then we tried a different model. This time I was down in your country, Mr. Chair, actually, out on a SAGD project in Cold Lake on the weapons range. We tried a nanny. You know, my mother-in-law at that time, the logistics weren't quite working out for her. This was after a couple of years. We tried a nanny service, and that didn't work out for us. I got this call down in the air weapons range, my wife asking me – I stayed out of that. That was arm's length. I provided guidance. There was no way I was getting in the middle of that dialogue of selection, et cetera. When she advised me of some of the circumstances, it was – I was managing about 99 contracts inside of that time – terminate services. Well, my wife took that quite literally. She had her out and gone, and that was done. Like, you don't mess with a mama bear and her cubs.

Then we ended up finding another service. We moved up to Athabasca, and with that, being in an area or community, especially rural, you have to do a lot of ground truthing. My wife had the luxury of having patients come in, and she literally had that litmus test. She was talking to different people, and Auntie Pam came up.

Well, Aunt Pam came up in a bunch of different areas. For my son and now my daughter at this point – you know, we’re moving ahead – that became the second mom, literally. It was another safe, stable place. It wasn’t licensed child care. It didn’t fit that licensed model at that time. Aunt Pam literally scooped us up, and we became adopted parents of her as well. It was one of those types of elements. Then once we moved back to the Edmonton area – I’m rolling the shot clock ahead – and another child later, we ended up out in Oneway, and we went through one home that didn’t quite work, which was licensed. It didn’t quite fit.

Again, every time that we’ve experienced this – arguably, I’m at arm’s length – you test with the community regardless of where you’re going. We have that luxury predominantly with smaller areas, but I would suggest that even the larger urban areas have that same ground truthing, that the impetus has to be put on the parents as well. It’s not just: the government is going to do it all for you. Again, these are your extensions. They’re your children. You have to be very protective, you have to be very careful, and you have to do that. It’s not for the faint of heart just to let your kids be raised by wolves, so to speak. You have to make sure that you’re checking the place out. Not only is it the cleanliness, not only is it seeing how the other kids react; it’s the other parents that are around them. There’s a lot of ground truthing that goes in place if you’re going to make sure that everything is okay.

That other home didn’t work out, but then we latched on to another one. This was Celine and Yvonne Touzin. They were established for a long time, and it took us a while to get into their home. Once we did, that was basically it. Now we have this French Canadian family that took in our kids and literally scooped them up. I mean, they moved out from Quebec probably about 20 some-odd years ago and made their start out west, and they embedded in the community. We literally had our kids scooped up. I just miss those folks to tears. Our batch of kids, with a few other ones in the home – they were licensed, again – met the capacity, did all those things. She retired out, and probably the biggest crocodile tears moment was when these nice folks that we met through our day home also kind of adopted us as parents, as kind of their de facto kids, because their kids were all back down east in Quebec, as their extension of their little family.

Again, in all the consultations that you’ve taken, you’ve gone through this, understanding that not one size fits all based on our demographic communities. I just cited off four different communities that we bounced around through. My oldest now is 16, then 14, 12, and 10. We went through that, and I’m very happy to say that there were no real issues. There are always a few things that get crosstreaded, but active engagement and parenting get that a long way. Ground truthing, making sure that you did those checks and the agency checks, of course, because not all agencies are created equal either. When you go on the licensing side, there’s some hair on that dog, too, so, again, you have to be really active.

What I’ve seen brought forward and some of the concerns here, you know, are valid. They’re concerned about sizes. As an MLA it was pretty shocking. I mean, we get access to reports and what happens when things don’t work in the system in public services and some of the absolute horror stories. So I can see why everyone here is trying to look out for the best sake of the kids and drop the partisanship. Most of us are parents here, and we understand that.

Again, I really implore your work and your efforts. I really do thank the member opposite for the thoughtful dialogue and for bringing this subamendment forward. Based on the minister’s dialogue – I was jotting down notes here feverishly, obviously, to get up to speed on it. But based on the minister’s speech here just recently, I understand that those are covered off. I understand that if you were to put that specific language in, it might actually cause

a few pitfalls. And if you’ve already run it through your department, then that makes a lot of sense.

I do appreciate the Member for Calgary-Klein noting a couple of gaps and bringing that forward. I really like it when, dropping the partisanship, we can actually stand up here and do something good for the kids. Appreciate your efforts on this. It does fit. I think it will do a lot for the next generations going forward. Hopefully, my kids will inherit the windfall of some good legislation when I get my little grandkids running around there. That will mitigate some of those issues, and hopefully for those folks out there that need the choice and the option for affordability, et cetera, this helps provide that. We’re not picking winners and losers. We’re broadening the base, helping people get back to work with having that comfort in knowing that their kids are protected and safe.

Thank you for this.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to subamendment SA1? I’ll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m pleased to rise again. I have to comment that I was, frankly, quite disappointed by the response from the Minister of Children’s Services. This subamendment was brought forward in the same intent in which the original government amendment was brought forward. It was brought forward in support of that and to clarify and make what we believe – to better fulfill the objective of the government. Specifically, the removal of the word “imminent” is meant to, I believe, meet the objectives that the minister stated.

My concern, Mr. Chair – I gave that specific example of the Calgary unlicensed day home, just a few weeks ago, in which the children were left unattended for an hour. I believe the minister was saying that she agrees that there should be an opportunity there for a stop order to be issued. Yet, unfortunately, the use of the word “imminent” would actually prevent that from taking place because by the time the ministry became aware, the children were, you know, safe at home with their parents or maybe even back with the child care provider. The harm had passed. That was no longer taking place. Yet I think we can agree, and I believe the minister does agree, that that’s a circumstance in which, at least, that unlicensed child care provider should not be permitted to continue to operate until such time as – I don’t know – that unlicensed child care provider can satisfy the minister that the conditions are safe.

Although, that being said, Mr. Chair, I have to point out that, again, there is no regulation of safety standards within child care, so I’m not even sure exactly how that would take place. Certainly, at the time when the ministry would get involved, the threat was not imminent. The threat already occurred. The danger already occurred. So if the minister is in agreement that that is a circumstance in which we believe a stop order should be issued, which I agree with, and we are in agreement on that in the spirit – this subamendment was brought forward with the intent of finding the best wording possible to capture those circumstances of danger and risk to a child’s safety and welfare. I’m simply proposing a thoughtful amendment that is not intended to undermine in any way the objective brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Klein, who brought forward the amendment. It’s in that spirit and to fulfill precisely what the Minister of Children’s Services just spoke to.

I also want to take a moment and comment on my disappointment about an issue that the minister raised, which I had hoped we would still, in the spirit of co-operation, be able to come to some common ground together on, and that is an issue about – and I’m still hopeful, by the way. Let me just put that on the record. I’m still hopeful that we can find some common ground here with respect to

some steps to potentially register or keep track of unlicensed child care providers. I've mentioned before, Mr. Chair, in my comments on this bill and on this government amendment, that unlicensed child care operates in a completely unknown, undocumented space. There are some good reasons for that, and certainly it will be challenging to try to figure out how to carve that out as to: what is the difference between, you know, a family member who's temporarily caring for a child and a private, unlicensed child care provider?

5:40

I do not propose to put forward that that is an easy challenge to tackle, but I believe that that is our objective and our goal as policy makers and as opposition, to contribute to that discussion around how to do that.

The issue about, potentially, for example, documenting, registering, requiring some sort of notification when unlicensed child care is being provided: does that make it licensed? I wholeheartedly disagree. What is licensed is described in the Child Care Licensing Act and is set out in the regulation. That describes what licensing is. It describes the standards that must be met. It sets out health and safety ratios that are very specific to meet a licensing requirement, and of course we know that when a child care provider, whether as a facility-based or as a day home or through an agency, is licensed, it comes with funding. It comes with wage top-ups. It comes with access to subsidies for parents. There are all those things that come into place. That does not mean that simply taking down information about who's providing unlicensed child care puts them in that licensed space. It is within the capacity of government and ministers to create that legislative scheme, to say what it would look like, and if it is perhaps going to be a third party or a different organization that's the one to track that, that's also within the scope of the authority. Simply because right now the Child Care Licensing Act and the regulations only predominantly deal with licensed child care does not mean that it cannot do more than that.

Mr. Chair, I will say that I do intend, hopefully in co-operation with the Minister of Children's Services, to bring forward an amendment that could begin to address some of these issues around registering or somehow documenting who is providing unlicensed child care. Again, I want to do that co-operatively because I am looking to achieve an objective that I think we share.

The parallel that I draw is that I do have some experience in the education world. Within education we have private schools that are both registered or accredited, and there is a distinction between that. Within the Education Act a registered private school is a private school that is indicating and notifying to the Minister of Education that they are providing schooling to a set number of children. They have very minimal standards that they have to meet, and because they meet those very minimal standards, they don't qualify for funding. That's a registered private school. There aren't a ton of them in Alberta, but there certainly are private schools – and that's a requirement under the Education Act. If you're going to be providing a private school, you have to register.

Of course, if you choose to become an accredited private school, there are significantly more requirements that you have to meet around curriculum, around student evaluation, and it comes with the funding that is associated with accredited private schools. It comes with the support from the Minister of Education for financial supports. It's tiers. It's tiers of provision of services.

I certainly think, while, yes, it's true, the Child Care Licensing Act currently does not substantively deal with unlicensed child care, that doesn't mean it's without the ability for the Minister of Children's Services, when this bill is open for amendment, to consider that as a possibility, and potentially, again, recognizing

that it may be a substantive amount of work. It may be something that, yeah, there's a lot of work to do to figure out how to do that properly. So perhaps it is better that that work be done under regulation, but simply to establish that that regulatory framework can exist, and the minister may even choose, as we know with regulations, not to issue regulations, but to do the work and to do the analysis and to figure out if that's possible, I certainly don't think that that door should be closed.

I think that that is something that we could certainly consider, and that is what I hope to bring forward. I listened to the Minister of Children's Services. I've heard much of what she said in response. I've heard it before. I think many members have. I would like to once again highlight that the purpose of the subamendment that is up for debate right now, that we are considering right now, putting aside right now that we have differences with respect to policy perspectives on how to approach early learning and child care from many different angles and that there is a diversity of views on those issues – that is not the subject of this subamendment today.

This subamendment is simply to, I believe, satisfy the objective that was put forward by the Member for Calgary-Klein, which is that we want to ensure that the Minister of Children's Services and the ministry have the ability to stop an unlicensed child care provider whose conduct or whatever has taken place – there are reasonable grounds to believe that the health and safety and welfare of a child is at risk. We are unanimous on that objective.

To that end, I simply – the subamendment is meant to clarify, to make sure that we are capturing all the circumstances that I believe we want to capture here, that we are talking not just about catching behaviour before it happens in a moment in time, but there are risks that we know that are posed to children that may not be considered imminent, but we know they are risks. We know as parents that we would not want to put our child in a setting where there are unknown adults who may have criminal convictions, who may be registered sex offenders. We know that that may not be imminent in the sense that that day we know exactly what harm is going to happen, but we would all agree that that is a threat to our children's health and safety, and we would not want that to happen. If there were reasonable grounds for the ministry to be aware of that, to be able to put a stop to it, I think that is a universal thing that we can agree on in this Chamber.

I appreciate that the nature of the way this process works, the minister did not have a lot of time with the subamendment to consider it. You know, I commented last night, not having much time myself to consider the government amendment. I do continue to hope that there are other amendments coming forward from the government to fully round out the objective that I believe that the Member for Calgary-Klein was bringing forward. I appreciate that perhaps the minister would like an opportunity to consider this subamendment more carefully or to talk to members of her ministry for thoughts on it. I appreciate that. Unfortunately, the way this process works is that there's not a lot of time for that. Sometimes it's disappointing in terms of drafting the best legislation and developing the best public policy, but I would encourage the minister, if possible, to give some thought to that, to consider it carefully. It is done in the spirit of co-operation and, most importantly, with the same objective of protecting the health and safety and welfare of children.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll take my seat.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to subamendment SA1? I recognize the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for her comments. I would say that as we stand in here and we debate this legislation and also both as former public servants – we both worked in ministries of education and different areas within government – our goal is good, effective legislation. You know, no time to look at amendments: I would say that while it was a short timeline, the ministry knows that for me this is not ideological. I am very much open to amendments, and they were very much ready to take a look at them and to review them. Again, as a former public servant, I am truly fortunate. I think that our staff in the Ministry of Children’s Services and our leadership there is incredible and does incredible work. They were able to provide feedback quite quickly for me this afternoon, which was essentially that this is too broad and that it’s not legislatively necessary.

I do understand that we have the same goal, but they’re suggesting that that’s not necessary and that the “imminent” wording is in fact aligned with what is used in Ontario, which is one of the guides that we used because that was one of the jurisdictions raised in the fatality inquiry that we were using to base some of our decisions on, whether that was in legislation, regulations, or policies. I would say that, you know, I do appreciate the intent, and I know that there are going to be other amendments that come forward. I absolutely, truly want to listen to all of them, and we will look at each and every one. But in this case my ministry gives excellent advice, and their advice is that it is too broad and unnecessary.

I think that also, you know, the member also referenced registering or tracking unlicensed. We don’t need legislation to do that. We can do that any time, and we can do that in any way. Putting it in legislation with no way to enforce it, again, isn’t effective legislation. I know the member also reflected third-party organizations doing this type of work of registering or licensing in a different type of way outside of the licensing act. Absolutely, that can also be done, but because it doesn’t exist right now, we can’t build it into the legislation.

These are excellent ideas that are being put forward. As I said before, we’re not done here. You know, a registry is something that only came up for the first time two weeks ago. It’s something that we’ve looked at, but, again, because it doesn’t exist, we can’t build it in right now, nor do we need to. It is a lot of regulatory work that would be done to create a framework like this because it only came up two weeks ago, and it’s not something we’ve consulted on. It’s not something that we would build in right now. Like, we wouldn’t build a regulatory body that doesn’t exist into our current legislation, but it’s absolutely something that we would look at in the future. The door is definitely not closed on that, so I do want to thank the member for her comments.

5:50

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to subamendment SA1?
Seeing none, we’ll call the question.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on amendment A1. Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1 on Bill 39?

Seeing none, we will call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Chair: We are now back on the main bill, Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020. Any members wishing to speak? I recognize the Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise here today to provide my support and deliver my thoughts on a very significant bill that seeks to address the concerns of Alberta families, Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, 2020. Before going further, I would like to express my appreciation to the minister for introducing the bill and for taking the lead to ensure supports are provided to improve the quality and safety of child care. I commend the minister for taking the time, for hearing the feedback that many of the parents, caregivers, early childhood educators, stakeholders, and licensing staff have given. Also, let me take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to all the stakeholders who have provided 9,776 written submissions and several responses as well as the 220 individuals who participated in 35 visual engagement sessions with operators and the 51 individuals that participated in three visual engagement sessions with the presence of licensing staff.

These consultations with Albertans were made in order to properly update the legislation as the regulation is set to expire in January 2021. It reflected that parents want more options and better access to quality child care, particularly for more conveniently located spaces, flexible hours, and more support for children with complex needs. While child care providers need more flexibility, the amount of red tape and unnecessary government paperwork they face takes too much of their time away from doing what they do best. Moreover, Mr. Chair, the current Child Care Licensing Act was last updated in 2008, so it has been a decade. That has been sufficient time to reflect on the matters that need to be updated surrounding the legislation and introduce changes that will ensure more quality and safety in child care. Bill 39 will update the act and simplify the language, best practices, and technology that will highlight the current standards and expectations of all the stakeholders, allowing less confusion, and will remove issues with interpretation of legislation and regulations.

I had the chance to meet and have a brief conversation with some of the staff of child care facilities in Calgary-East this September, and I was pleased to know that they have been doing their best to maintain safety as they reopen. In Alberta there are 2,916 licensed or approved child care programs, which includes daycares, out of school care programs, family day home agencies, group family child care, preschools, and innovative child care programs. The Alberta government currently provides over \$394 million annually in funding for child care. Of this amount, \$280 million is invested in child care subsidy and supports while \$114 million is invested in wage top-ups and professional development, funding for early childhood educators, which, Mr. Chair, is the highest level in the country.

Over the course of the pandemic \$99 million of government funding has been directly given to the child care operators through the safe restart agreement and sector-specific incentives from the government. Last April the child care accreditation program concluded. Nonetheless, wage top-ups and professional development funding continued and have been expanded to all certified child care staff. An additional 2,000 child care professionals benefitted from this funding.

With the health crisis we are facing, coupled with low gas prices and global isolation, the government has launched a bold and ambitious strategy on our way to recovery. Alberta’s recovery plan builds on our strength with timely targeted investments and bold policy reforms that will create tens of thousands of jobs and make Alberta more competitive in the long term. Let me just highlight that part of the recovery plan is to improve the lives of all Albertans through supports on every sector. It also comes with the job-creation tax cut. The fiscal impact of the job-creation tax cut is

estimated to be \$1 billion to \$1.3 billion over the next four years, based on the first-quarter update.

Under the Alberta recovery plan the child care sector received roughly \$28 million, including roughly \$8 million from the previous mutual agreement. This proves that the government pays significant concentration to child care centres and approved family day homes to ensure they're ready to support families while safely restarting their services through Alberta's economic recovery.

Phase 1 of the funding amounts to \$6.7 million, which was approved to centres as a one-time grant to cover up to 25 per cent of overhead costs like rent and utilities. This accounts for the remaining portion of expenses not covered by funding under federal programs. Phase 2 amounts to \$3.2 million provided upon reopening, representing a one-time grant of \$1,500 for cleaning and sanitization supplies to adhere to public health guidelines as well as to assist with staff recruitment and training. Phase 3 of the funding amounts to \$15 million for a one-time grant being received after three months of being open to offset deferred bills and to address unforeseen operational issues. To recognize the effects from other programs, another part of the recovery plan is an additional \$2 million of funding provided to family day home and preschool innovative programs.

On the other hand, the federal government is providing \$72 million for the child care sector in Alberta under the safe restart

agreement. This funding has enabled centres in other aspects to reopen and stay open safely. Funding can be used towards COVID-19 related costs such as staffing requirements, additional protective measures, and other operational costs.

The provincial government ensured supports are there for those who need them the most by enhancing the child care subsidy program to parents of about 28,000 children, who will receive an increase through this funding, with some paying as little as \$13 a day in a child centre of their choice. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic 109,000 children were enrolled in a licensed or approved child care centre or a day home. There are about 18,000 Albertans working in the child care sector. As of October 9, 2020, approximately 2,995 – that is, about 96 per cent – of programs have reopened, with an enrolment rate of 50 per cent.

Bill 39 will improve the standards for quality and safety in all licensed programs across Alberta so children are not only safe but are supported . . .

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but according to Standing Order 4(4) the Assembly stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca