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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 25, 2020

Day 71

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 25, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has a statement to make.

Gender-based Violence

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the start of the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. This international campaign begins on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. I know that all members of this Assembly will agree that violence against women and girls impacts everyone. Every Albertan deserves to live free from fear that they will be hurt because of their gender.

Unfortunately, this year has been especially challenging in our fight to address this and prevent this type of violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has demanded that we do our part to stay home to help prevent the spread. Unfortunately, we know that home isn't always the safest place for everyone. The stresses of the pandemic and our economy have produced a significant increase of calls to sexual and domestic abuse support lines. Alberta's government responded to this with an additional \$5 million to support women and children fleeing violence during the pandemic, ensuring they had access to the supports they needed. But we aren't stopping there, Mr. Speaker. We know that gender-based violence cannot be solved overnight. That's why our government will continue to pursue creative and innovative ways to address it and to support community organizations in their work.

The 16 days of activism campaign is one such creative way to spread awareness and encourage people to take action to prevent and address this violence all year long. I encourage everyone in this House to follow Alberta women on Twitter to learn more about resources available and about upcoming seminars and events they can participate in. This includes an online vigil we will be hosting on December 6, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. Even with the restrictions of COVID-19 it is important for Alberta's government to recognize and honour the impact of that day and the lives of the 14 women lost at l'école Polytechnique at the Montreal massacre 31 years ago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 47

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the government likes to claim that Bill 47, a key piece of their agenda this fall, is all about workers and restoring balance, but nothing could be further from the truth. Here is the truth. Bill 47 is a mess and bad for workers. The three foundational rights workers have in health and safety – the right to know, the right to participate, the right to refuse – have all been significantly limited and weakened.

I spoke at length last night during debate about the damage being done to the right to refuse dangerous work. This is the last line of defence to keep workers safe, making sure a worker can stop, be taken seriously, have their safety concerns addressed, and make sure their rights are protected. Now it's less clear when a worker can refuse because the definition is less clear. If they do

refuse, workers will now be isolated, left alone to make their case to their employer, and after Bill 47 they may not get paid because they refused. The right to refuse has now been rewritten so that a worker has to wait for the employer to write a report before they can contact occupational health and safety. This makes no sense unless you're trying to stop workers from using this important right. To be very clear, Alberta workers have not used this right very often in the past.

But this bill is so much more than that. Through the changes to the Workers' Compensation Board, if a worker is injured on the job, they will now receive less support and benefits to help them stay afloat and recover. These changes are designed to put these reductions back into the pockets of corporations by transferring surpluses back to them. As workers have their supports reduced or have increased difficulty getting compensation or benefits approved, they and their families will fall into hardship. And this is happening in the middle of a pandemic, Mr. Speaker, while workers are already suffering, many of them contracting COVID or isolating because of COVID.

Let's be very clear. Bill 47 is not about restoring balance. Just like everything this government has done in labour, this bill is about swinging the favour towards corporations and away from workers. Once again this government is putting on full display who they represent, and it's not the workers of this province. For the UCP, deep pockets run the legislative agenda, and Bill 47 makes that abundantly clear.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Newbrook Observatory

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Newbrook Observatory is located about 100 kilometres northeast of Edmonton in Thorhild county. In 1946 the United States and Canada agreed to work co-operatively on space science projects, particularly meteorite observations. As part of this agreement several observatories were established in the U.S. and Canada at strategic locations best suited to capture the night sky. The Newbrook Observatory opened in 1952 and was equipped with a sophisticated Super-Schmidt Meteor Camera. From 1952-57 it was business as usual at the observatory as the meteor camera captured thousands upon thousands of photographs and spectrographs used to research our upper atmosphere.

However, on October 4, 1957, as an unsuspecting United States and Canada learned of the U.S.S.R.'s successful attempt to launch a satellite into orbit, the Newbrook Observatory bore witness to one of the seminal moments of the 20th century, the launch of Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite, a 185-pound, 23-inch wide ball with four radio antennas. Less than a week later, Art Griffen, resident scientist at the observatory, took the first North American photograph of Sputnik 1, confirming the Russians' claim. For one moment the world stood still, observing a photograph of a 23-inch ball, a silver streak across a black sky. The event that started the space race was first photographed in Newbrook, Alberta.

The Canadian government closed down the observatory in 1970, but I am proud to say that due to the work of several dedicated volunteers with the Newbrook Historical Society, the site is being turned into a museum and the camera is back in its rightful home. I encourage all Albertans to research the story of the Newbrook Observatory and to visit the freshly renovated home of this historical piece of equipment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Public Service Front-line Workers

Mr. Carson: Yesterday this Premier and his UCP government stooped to a new low as they levelled a ridiculous insult at workers in this province. They said that the public sector does not generate wealth, implying that they don't add value to our province and the economy. These are people on the front line of the fight in the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Speaker. They are literally putting themselves in the path of a deadly virus to care for our sick loved ones and provide other supports and services that we need. It's become quite clear with this UCP government that if you're not with them, then you're against them.

We have seen front-line health care heroes speak out about the conditions in hospitals. We've seen them speak out against how wrong it is for this government to be threatening to fire thousands of them once the pandemic is over. Rather than finding common ground with these workers or offering an olive branch, the UCP has chosen to demonize them over and over again. We've seen teachers and school staff speak out about class sizes and a lack of support for students, and the UCP's response was to fire thousands of them in the spring through a single tweet.

Mr. Speaker, a healthy economy relies on a healthy population. A healthy economy relies on a strong and well-supported education system. A healthy economy relies on grocery store workers, custodians, and on and on. Our economy is struggling now more than ever because of the complete lack of action from this UCP government, but rather than looking at themselves and realizing they're the problem, the Premier and his caucus continue to attack those who speak out against them.

Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. The outcry against this government is growing louder and louder by the day. Again, this UCP government has made it very clear that if you're not with them, you are against them, but I suspect that there are more Albertans against this government today than ever before.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Socialism

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The decision yesterday to reject an NDP socialist police state lockdown was the right one. Albertans will rise to the challenge and bend down the COVID curve.

Mr. Speaker, socialism is in opposition to liberty. It can only exist through the rough fist of the state. Socialism is fixated on fighting over a pie, not growing it, and inevitably shrinking it. When legal plunder displaces work as a ruling principle, a sustainable society is lost. Socialism is soul destroying, infecting a people with diseases of dependence and idleness. A people that is dependent is not free, and idle people are not happy.

1:40

We raise a voice of warning and of hope. Canada is marching towards bankruptcy, threatening to take Alberta down with it, adopting policies of economic self-destruction, undermining the capacity of its rainmaker partners, Alberta businesses and families, to provide for themselves and others.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta must protect itself from a socialist decarbonization reset, disconnected from economic reality and bankrupt of a vision of hope. A vision of hope is not one of anger, but it is principled, speaking the truth in love with firmness of mind. The right path forward is for Alberta to seek great self-reliance. Socialism fears self-reliance. Consistent, deliberate effort towards self-reliance will yield results and opportunities sooner than

anticipated. Enacting all fair deal recommendations is a good start. Better days are ahead.

COVID-19 and Seniors' Housing

Ms Sigurdson: The Premier hid from Albertans for 12 days. He dithered and procrastinated while thousands of Albertans were infected with COVID-19 and dozens died. The majority of those deaths were seniors, the very people this Premier promised to build a wall of protection around. He didn't do a single thing to protect seniors in long-term care yesterday, not one single thing. He spent a lot of time defending his small package of half measures to the extremist fringe of his caucus but not a single word on new safety measures for seniors. That's unforgivable.

He failed to act to protect the Albertans who are suffering and dying the most. He showered private operators with grants and corporate handouts, but he completely failed to hold them accountable for the staffing collapses in facilities like South Terrace Continuing Care, where almost every single resident has been infected. Revera says that they don't have the staff to get everyone out of bed in the morning.

Would anyone on that side of the House be okay with their parents living in those kinds of conditions? Clearly, they are okay with other people's parents suffering, because the Premier failed to produce the provincial staffing strategy for continuing care that we have called for since the spring. In fact, he's moving in the opposite direction, lifting the single-site rule for private operators who have lost control of outbreaks in their building. Instead of forcing profitable corporations like Revera and Extendicare to uphold their obligation to keep people safe, they're bending the rules and increasing the spread of COVID-19 to those facilities.

Gary Mason of the *Globe and Mail* wrote yesterday:

When the history of the country's response to COVID-19 is written, there will surely be a chapter devoted to the Alberta government's bewildering and, in many ways, grossly negligent response to handling the crisis.

Mr. Speaker, nowhere is this Premier's failure more bewildering and more deadly than his failure to protect Alberta's seniors.

International Traveller Pilot Program

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, we are facing uncharted waters with a global health pandemic, a global recession, and low oil prices. Recently we introduced a one-of-a-kind pilot program for international travellers. Since the beginning of the pandemic Alberta's government has highlighted the importance of protecting the lives and livelihoods of everyone. This plan introduces a new rigorous testing and monitoring program to reduce the mandatory 14-day quarantine for travellers. Travellers who decide to participate in the program will receive a COVID test upon entry into the country before heading into quarantine. If the test comes back negative, travellers will be allowed to leave their quarantine so long as they commit to getting a second test on day 6 or 7. Travellers will be closely monitored through daily symptom checks, required to follow enhanced preventative health measures like wearing a mask in public places, and avoid visiting high-risk groups.

Mr. Speaker, this will allow individuals that need to travel for work to have a shorter quarantine period, meaning that business leaders can continue to operate their business during these challenging times. This program is welcome news to help jump-start Alberta's economy. Our government is looking at ways to reduce quarantine periods while protecting the health of Albertans. The pilot will engage both levels of government as well as industry and

research partners. This pilot program marks an important step in our recovery plan, allowing businesses to operate in a safe and effective manner. I'm excited to see this program, and I sincerely hope to see something similar in the Edmonton area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Premier's Communications on COVID-19

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 12 days Albertans were abandoned by their Premier. He abandoned Alberta as the COVID case count climbed to record highs and families and friends were devastated by the deaths of their loved ones; 13,000 Albertans were infected by COVID-19, and this Premier vanished, leaving Alberta with no leadership; 94 Albertans died while this Premier and his cabinet made excuses for his cowardly and shameful behaviour.

While hiding from the people he was elected to serve, the Premier found time to talk to UCP donors. He joined Zoom calls and took questions in private meetings. Meanwhile the worst Health minister Canada has ever seen claimed that it was impossible for the Premier to be able to talk to Albertans. The Premier was available to join a \$1,000-per-ticket scotch tasting but refused time after time after time to stand with the chief medical officer and answer to Albertans on the most dangerous public health crisis in a generation.

Now, Dr. Hinshaw has done so much and she has worked so hard during this pandemic, yet even she became just another Albertan that this Premier abandoned and left to stand alone. All this from a Premier who lectures Albertans about the importance of personal responsibility, from a Premier who once proudly claimed ultimate responsibility for his government's response to COVID. He was happy to take credit for the good work, planning, and preparation of public health officials and front-line health care workers in the spring, but yesterday he failed to take their advice or have their backs. He failed to give them the tools they need to keep Alberta families and businesses safe. Instead, we got a grab bag of half measures, more designed to appease the extremist fringe of his own caucus than to protect the Alberta public.

Albertans deserve far better than this, far better than a Premier that ducks his responsibilities and refuses to lead. Shame on this Premier, Mr. Speaker.

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

Federal Economic and Energy Policies

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not long ago I had not heard of the great reset. It's only since the e-mails and phone calls I have received from constituents asking for comment that I looked into the term. Now it's on the cover of *Time* magazine, and the American media is quoting our Prime Minister. This past September at a United Nations conference Trudeau showed his true intentions for Canada's economy. He said: this pandemic has provided an opportunity for a reset; this is our chance to accelerate our prepandemic efforts to reimagine economic systems.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that struggling, unemployed Albertans who have lost so much and are desperate for hope will take little comfort knowing that our country's leader views their plight as an opportunity to drive and accelerate his agenda. Alberta already has the resources right here to produce affordable clean energy solutions for ourselves and the world. We're pragmatic leaders in clean energy technology, and our companies are already global leaders in environmental, social, and governance standards. This is truly a scary suggestion, that the Prime Minister of Canada is

willing to throw Canadians under the green bus in exchange to freeze out oil and gas, agriculture, and natural resources. Trudeau has enough on his plate to worry about, and he should focus on supporting Canada's small businesses and job creators. He should stop worrying about a fantasy economy and salvage the one that we have and that so many families are relying on.

MP Pierre Poilievre says it best in his new petition. "Canadians must fight back against global elites preying on the fears and desperation of people to impose their power grab." I urge Albertans to join in and sign his petition at www.withpierre.ca/stopthegreatreset and tell Ottawa to focus instead on protecting the lives and livelihoods of hard-working Canadians.

Oral Question Period

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

Premier's Communications on COVID-19

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, before we can even get to the substance of the new COVID-19 measures that the Premier announced yesterday, he owes Albertans some answers. For 12 whole days the Premier vanished off the face of the Earth while cases exploded, while pressure on the health system spiked, and while people worried about their economic security. While other leaders addressed their citizens, yes, even by video chat if necessary, this Premier went dark for 12 days. Premier, why didn't Albertans hear from you? Where were you?

1:50

The Speaker: I'm certain that the Leader of the Opposition wouldn't be referring to the presence or the absence of the Premier. Certainly, it sounded a lot like that.

The hon. the Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I was at home following the public health requirements to self-isolate, having been a close contact of somebody who had tested positive. I note that in the spring and summer the leader of the NDP attacked me for having done too many news conferences and being too involved in the public response of the government to COVID. What we have is just an NDP that swings at every single pitch, that attacks on everything regardless of the truth. It's slightly pathetic.

Ms Notley: He had time for a UCP AGM. He did not have time to address Albertans during a critical period, like when Alberta averaged 1,200 cases per day over the last week, surpassing 10,000 active cases, our tests showing an 8.3 per cent positivity rate, fatalities increasing. Last week alone we lost 20 people in one day. The fact is that it was clear well over a week ago that the Premier's wait-and-see approach was failing. Why did it take so long for Albertans to hear from him on this?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, 12 days ago the government introduced additional restrictions to address the fall spike in cases. We indicated that we would take time to see what impact they had. When it was clear that case counts continued to rise at a worrisome level, we then came forward with yesterday's strong and balanced package of additional public health measures, that are designed to bend down the curve while minimizing broader social and economic and health damage.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Ontario closed restaurants, bars, nightclubs, gyms, casinos, movie theatres on October 9, when their

active cases were 5,600, or .4 per 1,000 of the population. As of yesterday, when we finally heard from the Premier, Alberta had more than 13,000 active cases. That's 3.2 per 1,000 or, to put it another way, eight times the infection rate when Ontario took more action than this Premier did yesterday. Why did it take so long for this Premier to show up to work?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. the leader of the NDP that I have never left work. While I was in self-isolation at home, I was working all day, every day. This past weekend I was speaking to front-line physicians and nurses to get their view on COVID on the front lines. We worked for several days in developing yesterday's package, in fact, following an eight-hour cabinet meeting, because unlike the NDP, our approach is not an ideologically reflexive one to put hundreds of thousands of people out of work, but it's to balance the public health imperative with the broader health of our society. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

COVID-19 Protective Measures

Ms Notley: Quote: we must take action. Mr. Speaker, that's our CMO speaking before she brought her recommendations to cabinet. Yet yesterday we saw the Premier announce the rules for bars and restaurants, unchanged. These are the places where people get together in groups, well over 10 of them, indoors, without masks, and there are no new measures. This is the opposite of what we see in other provinces, almost all of which have far fewer cases than us. Is the Premier really trying to tell this Assembly that Dr. Hinshaw recommended that they all stay open?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the measures announced yesterday with respect to bars and restaurants are to limit service to family cohort groups, which is precisely the same policy of the NDP government in British Columbia. I know the NDP doesn't like restaurant owners. They boycotted Restaurants Canada meetings. They used to trash restaurant owners when they were in government. They pushed hundreds of restaurants out of business. Forty per cent of restaurants are saying now that they could not survive another shutdown. She wants to throw thousands of them out of business and tens of thousands of Albertans, particularly women, out of jobs.

Ms Notley: This Premier's failure to control the virus is what's going to cause the shutdown he claims to be so concerned about.

Now, after the CMO made her recommendations, these guys went behind closed doors for over 10 hours to broker their deal. The outcome? An irrational mask policy that leaves Albertans, many of whom live in communities with alarming case rates, as the only Canadians without a mandatory mask rule. It's painfully obvious that medical advice is not what's driving the decision-making. Instead, the tail is wagging the dog, and that tail consists of his extremist, antiscience, antimask caucus members. To the Premier: why are you putting . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: What we are seeing here on vivid display is the same approach that Alberta's NDP has taken to this public health crisis from day one, which is to see it as a political opportunity to do the only thing they know how to do, which is to attack, divide, and deceive. Mr. Speaker, it is irresponsible. They are panic mongers. All they seem to do is to inflame panic. We don't have a single COVID case in two-thirds of our hospitals. We've only seen 18

restaurant outbreaks out of 13,000 businesses, but she wants to punish 13,000 business and 175,000 workers instead of taking reasonable measures.

Ms Notley: His reasonable measures mean that we have the highest number of cases in the country, over three times that of Ontario. He is losing the fight. He's catering to his antiscience, antifact, antimaskers in the caucus, and he's doing it at the expense of Albertans' health and safety. His members have said: wearing masks drives the spread. They've said: keeping kids safe at school is excessive risk aversion. Why are you letting these dangerous voices drown out what doctors, scientists, and health professionals are telling you, begging you to do?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP was parroting the World Health Organization and the Public Health Agency this spring, telling people not to wear masks, this government was advising people to wear masks. This was the first . . . [interjections] Boy, you know, she has so much respect for this place. She can't stop heckling. I was in Parliament for 19 years. I can't remember a leader heckling like that. It just shows that they're addicted to division and panic. This was the first provincial government to recommend mask usage, the only provincial government to provide tens of millions of free masks. There is now a mask mandate where 83 per cent of cases are.

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

Ms Notley: The only provincial government without a provincial mask mandate.

COVID-19 Statistics and Modelling

Ms Notley: Now, this Premier told Albertans that he's locking down their homes because that's where most of the spread is coming from, but he doesn't know where the spread is coming from. No one does because our contact tracing system has collapsed. We don't know the source of more than 85 per cent of new cases, and if you got sick more than 10 days ago, we've given up trying to find out. Does the Premier not realize that his own failure to prepare for the second wave, to hire more tracers means that the very idea of targeted restrictions no longer applies?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, you know, one of the fundamental truths about the NDP is that they really don't like Alberta. They don't like to celebrate the fact that we've had the strongest contact tracing system in Canada, that we've had the highest per capita levels of testing, the best prepared with respect to personal protective equipment and ventilators, the first province to have an online assessment tool, the first province to have a contact tracing application. We continue with contact tracing like all other places. It's focused on priority populations. Of course, we know where spread is coming based on hospitalizations, and we're putting the resources where they are most needed.

Ms Notley: What Alberta has is the highest per capita case growth.

Now, the Premier's inaction broke Alberta's data collection system. We don't have data for 85 per cent of new cases. He says that people aren't exposed to the virus at restaurants and bars, but he has no evidence to back that up. Meanwhile the CDC says that restaurants and bars are a significant infection source, and other provinces with far fewer cases have restricted them. Premier, if you want to argue evidence, why are you ignoring what's happening in other jurisdictions, ignoring medical research, and pretending you have data which you don't?

Mr. Kenney: Data: 18 outbreaks associated with 13,000 hospitality businesses since they reopened in June. That's 99.9 per cent that were not associated with outbreaks, 1 per cent of traceable cases over the past nine months associated with restaurants, bars, and pubs. Mr. Speaker, in terms of following other provinces, why does the NDP have to politicize everything? Our policy approach here is almost identical to that of British Columbia, with a similar rise in cases under an NDP government with respect to restaurants and most other matters.

Ms Notley: B.C. has less than half the cases of Alberta and a significantly larger population, so we're nothing like them, Premier. Learn your file.

The fact is that this province has no idea where things are because they don't have the data. What they do have are projections for case numbers, for hospital capacity, for ICU availability, all at his fingertips, along with other modelling. Albertans are demanding to know how he is making his decisions, with what information. Will he release that information, and if not, why not?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, AHS uses its early warning metrics at all times to identify potential surges and need for capacity, so it's not modelling. We did the modelling in the spring to see what the worst case scenario is, and we are prepared for it. We demonstrated that, for example, through ample supplies of personal protective equipment.

With respect to B.C., yes, their case count is lower because their testing has been one-third of our level, Mr. Speaker. Their velocity of case growth is similar to Alberta's. Why do we have more cases than B.C.? In large measure, it's because we are testing at three times their rate. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: We're testing too much. Thank you very much, Donald Trump.

COVID-19 Protective Measures (continued)

Ms Notley: Quote: these measures might have worked a month ago, but they're too late to fix what's happening now; the shells are in the air. Mr. Speaker, that's ICU doctor Dr. Darren Markland, who says that beds are at capacity and doctors are two weeks away from triage. He compares the new measures to IKEA instructions, unclear and difficult to interpret. Doesn't the Premier realize that by continuing to delay and to avoid real action, he's making things more confusing and he's encouraging the spread of the virus?

Mr. Kenney: Let's be absolutely clear about what the NDP wants to do, Mr. Speaker. They want the government to essentially create a quasi-police state. They want us to shut down and destroy permanently – permanently – tens of thousands of owner-operated businesses. They want us to throw hundreds of thousands of people into unemployment. They want us to do all of this because that's what – they're socialists. They are addicted to command and control of people's lives. [interjections] This government is focused on . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I have no problem hearing the Leader of the Opposition's question. I often have a problem hearing the Premier's answer. You might not like the answer, but he's entitled to give it.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what they want to do is to put hundreds of thousands of people out of work. What we've done are strong

and stringent measures that are focused. If they are insufficient, there will be additional measures.

Ms Notley: Let me be perfectly clear to this Premier. Your negligence is far, far more dangerous to our economy and the people who rely on their jobs than sound public health measures.

Quote: we are in a car that's careening toward a cliff; we had a chance to turn the wheel or hit the brakes, and all we've done is taken our foot off the gas. Mr. Speaker, that's Calgary urgent care doctor Dr. Raj Bhardwaj. He questions why we're not doing more. He questions why masks still aren't mandatory. Premier, can you explain why you are ignoring so many doctors who are begging you to finally take real action?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, while the leader of the NDP seems obsessed with telling some guy working in a barn 400 kilometres from a major population centre that he has to wear a mask, our focus is on actually preventing major vectors of transmission based on data. The single largest one of those is social activity, particularly private, at-home social activities, which, based on . . .

Ms Hoffman: You don't even know that.

Mr. Kenney: Yes, we do know it.

. . . nine months of data, with the most robust contact tracing system in Canada, is associated with at-home social activities, which we banned yesterday in an extraordinary exercise of state authority.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is continuing his discredited, libertarian approach of pitting the economy against the health of Albertans, and he's going to sacrifice both as a result. He's been MIA for 12 days. His inaction has cost us all our data, which we don't have. He's refused to look at other provinces' best practices. He's catering to the antimaskers in his caucus. He's not listening to doctors, and I suspect he's not listening to key public officials advising him. Quite frankly, yesterday it looked like a declaration of giving up. Why is he working so hard to let Albertans down?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, when the member says that we don't have data, we have nine months of accumulated contact tracing data. She just accused this government of taking an extreme libertarian position when, for the first time in the history of this province, yesterday we made it illegal to visit people's homes. Only the NDP could consider that an extreme libertarian position. Here's the problem: their first resort is to totally demolish constitutionally protected rights and freedoms. We believe that should be a last and limited resort.

Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant

Mr. Loewen: Our government has provided billions of dollars in supports to small businesses throughout the pandemic. These critical job creators have invested their life savings, putting it all on the line in order to provide for their communities and create jobs, and many of them have been hit hard. In fact, just today I received a message from a small-business owner that had planned an event but now has to cancel because of yesterday's announcement, costing them thousands of dollars. That is why the recent announcement of the expansion of the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant was welcomed by so many. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: who qualifies for the grant under the expanded criteria?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. Small-business owners: we just want to commend them for all of their efforts throughout this pandemic and the uncertainty that they have. They've done their job: they've put in place the protection, they've kept their workers safe, and they've kept their customers safe. We want to be there for them. What we have here with new health measures: if they see a 40 per cent reduction in their revenues, they can qualify for a second relaunch grant of up to \$5,000.

Mr. Loewen: Given that that same small-business owner wasn't eligible for previous grants because his business only started on July 1 and given that so many other businesses have received the grant already and now our government announced new measures to stop the spike in new cases and given that this means that, tragically, many businesses will have to either close completely or implement new measures to enhance their safety measures and that ensuring they can access support will be critical, can the minister tell us when businesses that meet the reduced revenue reduction threshold will be able to apply for funding?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right now we're working through the algorithm to make sure we have the back-end support. This new, second launch of the relaunch grant should be available in early December. It'll be built upon the old system that we had as well. The existing system that we had there for the first grant is still available, is still open to small businesses that are out there. This is a second application as well. We're here to support small businesses, up to \$10,000 of support for those that have been impacted by these health measures.

Mr. Loewen: Given that many businesses and nonprofits could have received the relaunch grants months ago and given that, sadly, retail, restaurants, gyms, and many other businesses are going to also be facing new restrictions, there will likely be need for them to receive a second payment from the relaunch grant. Can the minister tell us when the affected businesses will be able to receive the second payment of the grant?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had over 16,000 businesses take advantage of the first relaunch grant for up to \$60 million. They've been allocated already. We have a budget of \$200 million for this program. That's why we're putting in place this second relaunch grant available to them. We've lowered the threshold from 50 per cent of revenue down to 40 per cent, and that'll be retroactive to the beginning of the program for small businesses that applied earlier on. We're going to continue to be there to support small businesses. We're in that fourth quarter right now. We all know how hard COVID has been on us, our families. We're going to be there for small businesses as we come forward and we move out of this pandemic.

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

COVID-19 Protective Measures (continued)

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After 12 days in hiding while dozens of Albertans perished and thousands more were infected with COVID-19, the Premier emerged to present a small

package of half measures. Front-line health care professionals say that it's too little, too late, and it obviously falls short of the advice public health professionals would give when we face the highest number of active cases in Canada. To the Premier: will you give your word to Albertans that you took all of Dr. Hinshaw's advice this week, and will you prove it by releasing the complete package she presented to cabinet on Monday?

Mr. Shandro: Let's start off with the totally insane proposal of the NDP, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier should be breaking his self-isolation requirements. It's totally insane.

Look, none of what the hon. member said is true. Dr. Hinshaw was fully involved in the drafting of the measures, and as with anything, she provides a range of options to government and the civil service and walks us through the advantages and the disadvantages of each of those options. She was a full participant in the discussions when the measures were decided, and we're thankful to have a chief medical officer of health here in Alberta who is focused on protecting the lives and the livelihoods of all Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: What's insane, Mr. Speaker, is that we continue to be the only jurisdiction in Canada without a provincial mask mandate. Masks don't close businesses or harm livelihoods or impair the freedoms of Albertans at all. Given that they're a simple and low-cost way for every Albertan to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, particularly when we don't know where 80 per cent of new cases are coming from, to the Premier: isn't it true that you ignored Dr. Hinshaw's advice on the mask policy and instead listened to dangerous misinformation from the antimask conspiracy theorists in your own caucus? If I'm wrong, please prove it; just release her advice.

2:10

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, totally insane, totally incorrect, but, look, congratulations to the NDP here in November for starting to ask questions about COVID, when they've been totally AWOL on asking questions about COVID throughout the rest of the pandemic. It started off with the Health critic being benched by his party when he started correctly complimenting the AHS performance review and then spent the rest of the spring and summer asking questions about the most insane and crazy conspiracy theories that he could. Thank you for them actually finally directing their attention to COVID. What he said is completely incorrect, and we'll continue to listen to the advice of Dr. Hinshaw.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the Premier's restrictions on public indoor gatherings are packed full of complicated exemptions that can't be based on data because the Premier did nothing while our data-gathering system collapsed and given that the data from other jurisdictions includes the effects of their public health measures, many of which have been in place for weeks, to the Premier: isn't it true that your actions were driven by the extremist fringe of your caucus? If not, once again, why won't you simply prove it and give Albertans the chance to judge for themselves by releasing all of Dr. Hinshaw's recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to walk the hon. member through since he was never given the opportunity by Edmonton-Strathcona to have a seat at cabinet. Obviously, we cannot betray cabinet confidences and will not be doing such, but I can let the hon. member know, again, that Dr. Hinshaw was directly involved in the drafting of these measures.

She walked government through all the options that could have been available to us and what the advantages and disadvantages were for that, and she, again, was a full participant in the conversations that occurred at the cabinet COVID committee. We're very thankful, as I said previously, to have a chief medical officer of health who is dedicated to protecting the lives and livelihoods of Albertans.

School Class Closures

Ms Hoffman: In July I presented the Minister of Education with our detailed plan for a safe and successful school re-entry. Our plan has 15 points, but the primary call was to spread students out and to staff up to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to reduce the number of close contacts in schools. But like so many other aspects of the UCP's pandemic response, the minister failed to act. Yesterday the Premier pulled the plug and sent all grades 7 to 12 students home. Will the Premier finally admit that his minister's plan was an abject failure?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. As of today only .1 per cent of staff and students have active cases of COVID-19. Our plan has worked, is continuing to work. Students are safe in school now, and they will continue to be safe in school when they return. These new measures are part of a province-wide effort to slow the community transmission that is occurring, and the upcoming Christmas break only presents us with an opportunity for a brief transition to at-home learning without impacting the quality of education to our students. Our schools continue to be safe environments, and they always will be.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister is clearly reading from talking points that were written before yesterday's announcement to close schools and given that in the last two weeks alone more than 563 Alberta schools had reported cases of COVID-19 and tens of thousands of students and staff have been forced into isolation and given that contact tracing has collapsed and Dr. Hinshaw says that many school cases will never be traced and given that hundreds of thousands of students will be forced to abandon their classrooms on Monday, Minister, why did you spend \$4.7 billion on a failed corporate handout and fail to protect kids?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, since day one the NDP have disrespected the advice of our chief medical officer of health and claimed that schools are not safe, but they couldn't be any further from the truth. We have seen it over and over again. Only one-tenth of 1 per cent of staff and students currently have active cases of COVID, and our schools continue to be safe. The NDP knows that we are currently in a state of public emergency. This decision to temporarily transition grades 7 to 12 students to at-home learning is part of that broader effort, as I mentioned earlier. We're going to continue to keep our students safe.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Premier went on talk radio this morning and said that it was fine and safe and reasonable for students between grade 7 and grade 12 to stay at home and learn by themselves but given that parents of disabled children are reaching out to me saying that this Premier has no awareness of the struggles that they're facing and given that the Premier said that his plan originally was fine and it's been proven to be an abject failure, will the Premier stop making excuses and start acting? Will he implement our plan by the time kids go back to school in January?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP, who have proposed unrealistic ideas and continually have ignored our public health experts, we developed a robust school re-entry plan that has kept our students and our staff safe. In fact, I would like to quote Jason Schilling, president of the ATA, who said yesterday that they "support the direction taken by government to move to a combination of in school and at home learning." We recognize that our special-needs students need specialized supports. We've created an exemption for those students so they can continue to learn in school, and they need to contact their parents.

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

Municipal Infrastructure Grant Programs

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the city of Lethbridge received funding for city projects through the municipal stimulus program and the municipal sustainability initiative offered by our government. This funding has been allocated to critical projects within Lethbridge such as multiple projects for the Lethbridge Airport. Given that projects like these are critical to municipalities across Alberta, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the application process for municipalities, and how does the ministry decide which projects receive funding?

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. Municipalities submitted information about local projects that are shovel ready, worthy by October 1, 2020, and the MSP program has ensured that many of these important projects are happening right now. This is an important part of our recovery as well, to make sure people are working in our communities. I just want to note as well that in the city of Lethbridge over \$6 million of projects were allocated under this program here recently. It's a credit to those people who are on the ground, getting that work done that's critical to our communities.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that our provincial economy is at one of its lowest points in several years due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and given that many municipalities have projects that are vital for their communities and also given that the government pledged to help municipalities weather this fiscal storm with Alberta's recovery plan, to the minister: how do the MSP and MSI grants help to reach the goals of Alberta's recovery plan?

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. As part of our recovery plan we accelerated a lot of work going into infrastructure across Alberta, the single largest year of spending on infrastructure in our history, over \$10 billion of projects, over 50,000 jobs created right now, at a time when we need those jobs and need to get that infrastructure built. This MSP program is a critical part of that infrastructure strategy, and we commend the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for their work in making sure that we can get Albertans working through these tough times.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that municipalities are working hard to stimulate their local economies and given that many of the projects need and receive funding to help incentivize local economies and also given that many Albertans continue to struggle to find work in the current economic climate, can the minister please explain what the economic benefits of these grants to municipalities are.

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These build bridges, fire stations, water systems, and other critical local infrastructure that keeps our communities safe, that makes them efficient. We thank all of our municipal leaders that put forward their proposals. Those were shovel ready. Over \$500 million have been allocated for this program. It's a critical part of our recovery plan, to make sure we have safe, sustainable communities of the future. We're encouraged by that. I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for her leadership throughout this pandemic. I also want to commend the Member for Lethbridge-East for his advocacy for his community.

Public Service Front-line Workers

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I'm disgusted. For months and months I've watched Alberta's front-line heroes work night and day to save lives and keep our province safe. We owe our health care heroes a debt we can never repay, yet they're under constant and unrelenting attack by this UCP government. Now as cases climb and more and more Albertans are lost to this pandemic, the Minister of Finance's financial update describes these front-line heroes as being little more than a drain on our economy. To the minister: where do you get off insulting the very people putting themselves in the path of COVID-19 to care for sick Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I categorically reject the assertion in that question. This government greatly appreciates the work of all of our public servants, particularly those on the front lines of health care these days as they deal with the pandemic. We're concerned about the safety and welfare of all of our public servants. I categorically reject the assertion in that question.

2:20

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that the Finance minister said that our health care heroes, quote, withdraw money from the economy and don't contribute and given that this disgusting, shameful smear was published in an official government fiscal update and given that we have workers as we speak, right now, providing essential services, in so many cases for low wages, and they are contributing to this great province – we value each and every one of them, as do my colleagues – to the minister: will you stand in the House and apologize for the remarks in your fiscal update, make it clear for the record that public-sector workers contribute a great deal to our economy?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, here's another example of the NDP playing really fast and loose with the facts. Here's the reality. This government greatly appreciates our public service. We greatly appreciate the great work that is done on the front lines of health care, particularly these days during a pandemic.

Ms Gray: Given that the publishing of this smear in a fiscal update was a surprise to so many who watch these types of documents,

given that this attack was just the latest in a series of very deliberate smears that we've seen this government undertake against public-sector workers, and given that I would love to see how these ministers operate without the support of teachers to teach their kids, nurses in the hospitals when they get sick, the staff here at the Legislature that keep their offices clean, to the government. There is no point in asking you another question, so I really just want to end on a statement. I was made sick to my stomach reading that. Workers do not deserve . . .

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite rose and did not ask a question, but let me repeat myself. This government greatly values all of the efforts of our great public servants, particularly those on the front lines of health care. I would ask the members opposite why they continually undermine the credibility of our chief medical officer, who is also doing incredibly good work, hard work on behalf of all Albertans.

Provincial Second-quarter Fiscal Update

Ms Phillips: Yesterday the Finance minister released an update on the provincial finances. Those documents should have shown us all of the work, planning, and preparation over the summer to keep the economy moving through the second wave of COVID-19, but we saw nothing of the sort: no new programs for small business or a system to take the applications that is up and running and ready, no substantive plan for contact tracers, no provincial money for safe schools, no money to help sick workers. To the Finance minister: why did he steal the Premier's disappearing act right when Albertans needed them the most, and why didn't we see any new types of support for Alberta business in the update yesterday?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I fear the member opposite has not seen the report. Renowned economist Trevor Tombe has stated that this mid-year fiscal update was one of the best fiscal updates and most comprehensive he has seen. We have provided all of our economic recovery measures. We went through a detailed account of our funding for our health response to this pandemic. I would ask the member opposite to read the report.

Ms Phillips: Given that Professor Tombe also called page 10 "pure political drivel," Mr. Speaker, given that the only thing it looks like the minister has invested in has been a catcher's mitt for money from Ottawa, and given that we are now in a pandemic crisis . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Phillips: . . . why did the minister just tell us about a bunch of programs he announced in March, many of which have either wrapped up or weren't helpful in the first place or are the same as before, and why don't we see any commitment to any different course of action now when it comes to keeping small business alive and the economy moving?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for that question because we really take pleasure in telling the story of this government's response to the COVID pandemic and to our great economic challenge. Back in Budget 2020 we added an additional \$500 million to Health to meet the pandemic challenges. Since then we've continued to fund Health so they can meet this great pandemic challenge, and we've rolled out a series of programs to support small businesses.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that Ottawa gave this Finance minister a billion dollars to put unemployed oil and gas workers back on the job and given that less than half of that money has moved, is this minister really telling Albertans in a time of double-digit unemployment that he's done all that he can? No wonder we have the worst performing economy in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we were successful at leveraging a billion dollars from the federal government, \$1 billion of the \$20 billion this province sends over every year. We have rolled out a program, Energy has rolled out a program that will effectively clean up and reclaim inactive gas wells and put thousands of Albertans and Alberta service companies back to work.

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

COVID-19 Protective Measures (continued)

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a targeted, risk-based approach, municipalities in the enhanced category are looking at restrictions on crowd sizes, limiting the number of people allowed in retail businesses, and a smaller group of in-person attendees for religious services. Many constituents have reached out to me, pleased with this pragmatic approach to target Alberta's response where it is actually needed. To the Minister of Health: if more changes are to come in our COVID response, will they be brought forward regionally where deemed necessary?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been clear. We're not going to impose a one-size-fits-all approach. We reject the NDP's demand to close tens of thousands of businesses indiscriminately regardless of the evidence and throw hundreds of thousands of Albertans out of work. The NDP is making a fetish out of closing businesses as if it were some kind of a test of virtue. Throwing people out of work in an economic crisis is not a virtue, not when it's against the evidence and when it adds to the need for public subsidies in a province facing a \$21 billion deficit.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard from teachers, parents, and trustees that while there is concern, there is great support for keeping kids in school. Given that in-person classes will break a week early for the holidays and resume for all students on January 11, 2021, and given that some schools in my riding have cases while many others do not, to the Minister of Education: can you please explain what led to the decision to temporarily transition grades 7 through 12 students online and to do so across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education has risen.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our school re-entry plan, as I said earlier, has done an excellent job at managing the pandemic in our schools. As of today .1 per cent of staff and students have active cases of COVID-19; 99.9 per cent do not. These new measures are part of a series of Alberta-wide efforts to slow community transmission of COVID-19 as part of the ongoing state of public health emergency. My department and I continue to work with education stakeholders and Dr. Hinshaw and will

continue to adjust our plan as necessary based on up-to-date public health advice.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Businesses in our province have invested in ways to keep their doors open despite the ups and downs of public health orders. Given that the businesses I hear from are concerned about their survival even outside the enhanced zones and given that so many constituents have reached out, concerned that we would have a Manitoba-style lockdown, to the Minister of Health: how can businesses continue to follow the public health orders while still operating during the holiday season?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our businesses here in the province and their staff are working hard to make sacrifices to protect each other as well as their customers, as we're asking all Albertans to do. Mandatory measures at this time of year are particularly challenging and destructive to businesses. We encourage Albertans to support their local businesses through online delivery, curbside pickup, and shopping at off-hours to align with capacity restrictions. The new measures we announced yesterday will be in place for a minimum of two weeks, and they will be reviewed by December 15 at the latest.

Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance Program

Member Loyola: While this government fails to provide any new support for Alberta small businesses, many owners are still looking for answers about the failed Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program that this government participated in with the federal government. This program has been a total failure and left thousands of small and medium-sized businesses without access to dire rental supports because they couldn't get their landlords onboard. To the minister. With the failure of the CECRA program, many businesses have had to pay rent with no relief. Will this government commit to providing a grant to those businesses who failed to qualify for CECRA because of the failure of this government?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if maybe the NDP staffers forgot to e-mail this person about new programs that have come out, like the Member for Lethbridge-West, who didn't read the report earlier on, but I'll give this member another update that I did earlier on in question period. There is a second relaunch grant available to small businesses. News flash to that member: read the report; it's there, two relaunch grants available for small businesses. We're going to continue to be there for small businesses. We're going to work with our federal government as well to make sure that we have the right programs in place for commercial rents as well.

2:30

Member Loyola: So no grant, then.

Given that the reports indicate that less than 22 per cent of the businesses that were eligible for Canada emergency commercial rent assistance actually received any funding and given that this government allocated \$67 million for CECRA to subsidize rent for small businesses, to the minister: can you tell us how many Alberta businesses received the rent subsidy, how much of the budgeted \$67 million was paid out, and will this government at least allow small businesses access to the remainder of the budgeted \$67 million and commit that funding here and now?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, tens of millions of dollars have gone out into these programs. We also have a \$200 million program in there for small businesses. To that member opposite: my goodness, could he listen to the program? Earlier on he said that we had no programs. Then I just informed him of the fact that we had two specific ones on top of the hundreds of millions of dollars in programs and deferrals that we've done. It's time for the NDP – maybe their staffers need to do their homework. We've got a website, Biz Connect. For their staffers: go there to make sure that their members reading notes can actually read it. That would be really helpful.

Member Loyola: Well, given that I'm listening directly to the small businesses and what they have to say and given that this government has decided to ignore the struggling businesses that have so far survived without any rent subsidy by not committing to provide them access to the money that was budgeted for them and given that this government's supplementary supply report is asking for the full \$67 million that was supposed to be a lifeline that kept Alberta small businesses open, to the minister: if you're not allowing the intended small businesses that access to the \$67 million, will you at least tell us where the funds are going? Be specific. These Alberta business owners deserve to know.

Mr. Schweitzer: It's passionate note reading over there today. Mr. Speaker, \$67 million has almost fully been disbursed in that program, and we're working with the federal government on a new program as well. But to that member opposite: it's time for them to do their homework. I come in here every single day. I'm going to be here this afternoon as well. We're going to talk about the recovery plan, all the programs that we've put in place for our small businesses. But I have a question for that member opposite: how many businesses would the NDP shut down right now? They have not answered that question. Their leader commented about the fact, about the thousands upon thousands of businesses that they would shut down right now. Irresponsible.

Economic Recovery and Women

Member Irwin: Yesterday the Premier insisted that we need to protect small businesses in the hospitality industry because: won't somebody think of the women? Now, this was a strange surprise to me and many others from a Premier and government that have shown little regard for over half the population and have repeatedly attacked women-dominated professions like health care and education. On top of that, they've denied that this economic downturn is having a serious impact on women, and they've mocked our calls for women's voices to be centred in economic recovery plans. To the Premier: how can you possibly think that any of us believe you actually care about women?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite typically asks very insightful questions in this House, but once again here and now we're seeing that they don't care about facts. They'd prefer to deal in fear. They don't care about Alberta; they don't care about Alberta data. We do have Alberta data, and I did reference it earlier this week. The Business Council of Alberta has suggested that women do in fact appear to be recovering faster than men, and I have brought copies to table later today so that the members opposite can read it. I do want to say that largely this is because of the approach we have taken to keep the vast majority of our economy open while keeping people safe.

Member Irwin: Given that the UCP has consistently called for lower wages for workers in the hospitality industry, an industry

dominated by women, many of whom are single mothers, those who are trying to just make ends meet, and that when asked about his government's response to the rising unemployment numbers of women in this province, the Premier didn't answer and instead pointed out how men were suffering and that this Premier also demanded that we apologize for raising the minimum wage, which, we all know, had a positive impact on those women workers, will the Premier or anyone over there apologize to the women of this province for the dire economic situation that your government has put us all in?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I feel that the members that need to apologize are the members opposite, the members who want to shut down every aspect of this economy, including the areas of this economy that predominantly hire women and employ women. Let me read this report that, again, I will table later today. "Especially telling is that the cohort we would expect to have the greatest child care responsibilities, women aged 25-54, have been the fastest to re-enter the workforce." Are they against that? I think they are. They want to close down the economy. How many people do they want to put out of work? How many women would they like to put out of work?

Member Irwin: Given that health care and education are dominated by women and that the UCP are eliminating 11,000 jobs in health care alone and that thousands of educational support workers are out of work after they were fired by this Education minister and that yesterday in this government's quarterly update they directly attacked public-sector workers, many of whom are women, to the Premier or any minister willing to account for his failures: given your apparent new-found respect for women workers in Alberta, will you stand today in this House and give your word to the women of this province that you will end your attacks on their professions and their livelihoods?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we can talk about personal attacks all day. I was personally attacked by providing an actual report from the Business Council of Alberta here which does suggest that our plan to both address the impacts of COVID-19, the small and medium-sized business grants – we know that we have a vast majority of female entrepreneurs here in Alberta. We have stepped up to support them through this pandemic, and we're also trying our very best to balance the lives and livelihoods of Albertans. That includes women. That includes keeping large parts of the economy open. We'll continue to listen to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Mobile-home Owner Concerns

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche has several amazing mobile-home communities, and for years residents have asked for access to the residential tenancy dispute resolution service. This spring legislation was passed to grant access for these residents to this service so that some of their concerns could be addressed not only more quickly but at a lower cost by avoiding the court systems. To the minister: is this important dispute resolution service now operational?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to say yes. We know that residents of mobile-home communities have been asking for access to the residential tenancy dispute resolution service for many years. Until this government those requests have fallen on deaf ears. We passed amendments in the spring, and as promised, full access is now available to residents of mobile-home

communities for tenancy-related matters. The opposition talks a big game, but talk is cheap, and the road to opposition is paved with good intentions. This government is listening and acting for Albertans in mobile-home communities now and forever.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that members opposite were really critical of taking time to properly train the dispute resolution service staff on the unique nature of mobile-home communities and given that they were also critical that amendments to the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act were not enough even though the changes that they called for couldn't actually be addressed through that piece of legislation, to the minister: now that residents can access dispute resolution services, can you tell us what other work is being done for mobile-home communities?

Member LaGrange: Happy to. Because this government took the time to speak with and listen to Albertans living in mobile-home communities, unlike the previous government, we know that residents' concerns go beyond tenancy-related issues. In order to fully understand the additional concerns that residents of mobile-home communities have, we've launched an online survey. I want to encourage all residents and landlords of mobile-home communities to take a few minutes to complete the survey, available on alberta.ca, by December 13. Once again, this government has taken action, and we're proud to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely fantastic to hear that our government continues to do more work on this file than the opposition ever did. Given the complete failure of the former NDP government to take any action related to mobile-home communities and given that numerous MLAs have heard specific concerns from constituents who live in these communities, myself included, to the minister: what actions are going to follow this survey?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the previous government shut down advocacy by their caucus members on this issue, but we are expanding conversations to include Community and Social Services, Health, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Housing, and we will have additional work as needed by Infrastructure, Justice and Solicitor General, and Transportation. Service Alberta will provide assistance if needed in the upcoming discussions. We are taking the concerns and requests of mobile-home residents seriously, which is a very welcome change after the inability of the previous government to take action. Please go to alberta.ca to respond to the survey. I encourage all to do so.

2:40

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

In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise to table a copy of the report entitled *The Surprising Picture of Women's Economic Recovery – It's Not What You Think*, referenced today in question period, by the Business Council of Alberta.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've two tablings that I referred to in my remarks earlier this morning in debate. The first is a press release from the Information and Privacy Commissioner on Bill 46, which she is urging us to delay the passing of.

The second is from the Canadian Association of Journalists and refers to Alberta's government getting recognized as being the most secretive government in Canada.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings of correspondence from constituents. I have the requisite number of copies for each. These are folks who have all written individual letters with respect to Alberta Parks policy.

We have the requisite number of copies from Drianna Zorn.

The requisite number of copies from Cheryl Limb, writing about concerns over closure or partial closure and privatization of parks.

We have a letter from Johnal Palahniuk, writing a letter about what they want to do to further help protect natural lands.

A letter from Abigail Stewardson, writing with her thoughts on the plans for, quote, unquote, optimizing Alberta Parks.

I have a letter here from Hanna Fantin, expressing her concerns over parks.

I have a letter here from Doug Ross, who writes that he wants his voice to be heard on his concerns about parks.

I have another letter here from Joanne Overn, who's very, very concerned about the effect on affordability for families that Alberta Parks policy will have.

I have another letter here from Edward Grant, who would like his letter tabled. He's very concerned about parks.

I have another letter here from Garnet Bailey, who has written and asked us to use this letter in whatever form it may help, with the requisite number of copies, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Alberta Health Act and the Mental Health Act the office of the Health Advocate and the Mental Health Patient Advocate 2019-20 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to calling Orders of the Day and immediately following Orders of the Day, the Clerk will call for the Committee of Supply. It will take just a few brief moments for us to get ready while the chair of Committee of Supply takes her seat. As well, officials that will be assisting the committee today will be coming into the Chamber. Once that's all set up, then the committee chair will call the committee to order.

Having said that, we're at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the Committee of Supply to order. Before we commence consideration of supplementary supply, I would like to briefly review the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) applies, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak ...
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (f) for the time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

During the first rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the first rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes. Provided that the chair has been notified, a minister and a private member may combine their speaking times, with both taking and yielding the floor during the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 48, approved by the Assembly yesterday, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

Hon. members, the Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2020-21 supplementary supply estimates. I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2020-21 General Revenue Fund

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2020-2021 supplementary supply estimates for the general fund. When passed, these estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$4.9 billion in voted expense funding, \$479 million in voted capital investment, \$207 million in voted financial transactions for the government, and \$7 million for transfers between eight departments.

These estimates report the funding needed for the government's fiscal plans as presented in the 2020-2021 mid-year fiscal update and economic statement and will provide additional funding to the following 17 departments: Advanced Education; Agriculture and Forestry; Children's Services; Community and Social Services; Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women; Education; Energy; Environment and Parks; Health; Indigenous Relations; Jobs, Economy and Innovation; Justice and Solicitor General; Labour and Immigration; Municipal Affairs; Seniors and Housing; Transportation; and Treasury Board and Finance. Total supplementary funding is approximately \$5.7 billion, and the primary reason for this funding is to support ongoing efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and fulfill the initiatives outlined in Alberta's economic recovery plan.

Early this year Alberta was hit by a triple black swan event. This included the greatest global economic recession since the Great Depression, an unprecedented drop in energy prices, and, of course, all at the same time as fighting a pandemic within our own borders. These three things combined have hit Alberta and our resource-based economy much harder than other jurisdictions.

When looking back to January and February of this year, before the pandemic began, early economic indicators were showing 2020 as a turnaround year for our economy. Growth was returning to Alberta's agriculture sector. Manufacturing exports were expected to rise. The real estate market was improving, and investment was returning to our province. In February year-over-year data showed that drilling activity was up 14 per cent, oil production was up 14

per cent, and exports were up 19 per cent. We saw increased retail sales, vehicle sales, and improved housing market activity.

But then the pandemic changed our world in a matter of weeks. Alberta's revenue has seen a steep decrease while, as a necessity and in an effort to combat the pandemic and its effects, expenses have risen. Funding these estimates is needed for government to achieve its two main priorities, combatting the COVID-19 pandemic and taking action to save the livelihoods of Albertans.

2:50

You will see in the estimates that the largest expense is for Health; \$1.2 billion will ensure that Health's efforts to combat COVID-19 are adequately resourced. I expect that there is full agreement by all the hon. members in this House that this is and should continue to be our first priority, but it's also equally important to protect livelihoods and help Albertans get back to work. That's why Alberta's government launched the Alberta recovery plan. Alberta's recovery plan takes bold and calculated action to get Albertans back to work, build infrastructure, and diversify our economy. We're strategically building on Alberta's economic strengths to attract investment and position Alberta for growth and prosperity. Alberta has the lowest taxes in Canada. We have historic industries like agriculture, forestry, and energy that provide a backbone for our economy, but we also have a thriving innovation sector, a world-class tourism experience, and great growth potential in financial services, fintech, aviation, and aerospace. Alberta's recovery plan builds on these strengths with targeted investments and bold policy reforms with a focus on immediate job creation.

We're making strategic investments in infrastructure across the province that will improve core service like water and waste-water systems but also position Alberta for future economic growth and investment by increasing our productivity and competitiveness. One example of this, Madam Chair, is the twinning of highway 3 between Taber and Burdett. The project construction itself will create 750 jobs, but once completed, the twinning will support the growing agribusiness sector in southern Alberta, an important part of our province's economy and recovery.

Funding will also go to the site rehabilitation program. We're partnering with the energy sector to reclaim thousands of oil and gas well sites that are no longer productive. This will put thousands of Albertans back to work and provide needed opportunity for our energy service sector.

The new innovation employment grant will encourage research, discovery, and renewed investment. The grant takes an incremental approach that is unique within Canada. This grant was created to support smaller and early-stage firms. Companies that are in the pre-income and scale-up phases will initially benefit from the employment innovation grant, but as they become more profitable and are phased out of the program, they will begin to benefit from Alberta's preferential business tax rate. As you know, Madam Chair, the acceleration of the job-creation tax cut will make Alberta the most attractive jurisdiction for new business investment in Canada. These measures along with our relentless effort to reduce red tape will position the province to disproportionately attract investment, which will lead to sustainable job creation and expanded economic and fiscal capacity.

Early in the pandemic one of the first concerns we heard from businesses was a lack of liquidity or cash availability. Our targeted COVID-19 relief programs addressed their immediate need with several deferrals, including Workers' Compensation Board premiums, where we also paid half of those expenses for small and medium-sized businesses.

We also implemented programs for people in need, including outreach and supports for the homeless and family and community support services, just to name a few.

The list of benefits and services this appropriation will fund is long and comprehensive. While the response comes at a cost, we cannot cower in the face of the most difficult challenge in decades. The pandemic and economic fallout have created unexpected financial demands. It's more important than ever to ensure government services are delivered most efficiently. Every dollar saved can be directed to our pandemic response and to our economic recovery. To that end, our efforts to bring down the cost of delivering services is continuing. Our government continues to be focused on responsible financial management. While the last nine months may feel like a decade, this pandemic and the resulting downturn will not last forever.

In fact, even as the pandemic attempts a comeback, we're seeing some evidence of economic recovery. We've seen a significant rebound in employment already this year, recovering more than 258,000 of the 361,000 jobs lost between February and April because of the pandemic. Alberta's manufacturing shipments increased 3.9 per cent in September to \$5.4 billion. Home sales in Alberta rose 2.9 per cent in October to 5,544 units, 20 per cent higher than February's levels, and retail sales have also recovered to prepandemic levels with a sales increase of 2.5 per cent in September, 1.9 per cent above its February level.

Madam Chair, while we're hearing positive reports of vaccine development, the resurgence of the virus in recent weeks reminds us that we're not through this yet, and we must keep our focus on the task at hand, strategically combatting COVID-19 and economic recovery. Although these days are challenging, we will get through this, and I continue to believe that Alberta's best days are still ahead.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, we will now move into the next 60-minute block, split up into groups of 20, with members of the Official Opposition.

We'll start with the first 20-minute block, and I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. Would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Ms Phillips: Yes, I think so. We can start there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Please proceed, then.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, and thank you for this opportunity to ask a few questions, a bit of clarity, a few more details. It's always good to be able to have a look and get some good answers on the record from the minister. I thank him for his time this afternoon.

I think, first, a couple of really quick two questions. One of them is on the emergency isolation benefit. I see in this update that we have a \$64 million forecast spend. On April 7 it was reported in the news media that the program had distributed \$91.7 million. Of course, in the first-quarter update it was written down that the program had distributed over \$100 million. Can the minister provide in which fiscal that initial claim of \$91.7 million – what part of it was in the previous fiscal year, what part of it was in this fiscal year, and of that \$64 million in emergency isolation benefit forecast, if the balance, then, is \$40 million? Is it \$30 million that was in the previous fiscal year? There are a number of numbers, and it's interesting that we need to get some clarity on this.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the question. The total amount spent on the emergency isolation program was \$108 million. This year, in the year ended March 31, 2021, we have spent \$64 million. The remaining amount was spent in the previous fiscal year.

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

Ms Phillips: Okay. Thank you very much for that answer.

Now, I notice here in the Q2 update that we have a capital plan commitment of \$8.4 billion. Then I look on the government's COVID recovery plan website, and it says that it's \$10 billion. Why the discrepancy?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. We did move forward with a full \$10 billion strategic infrastructure investment for the current year. Included in that \$10 billion is our investment this year in Keystone XL, which is expected to be \$1.5 billion. Combined with our capital plan, that puts our infrastructure investment to \$10 billion.

Ms Phillips: I have further questions about the small and medium-sized enterprises section in the second-quarter update. I just want to get some clarity on what has gone out already and what is forecast because it's characterized as a forecast. I'm just interested in how many supports have already happened as a result of the first-wave response and what's forecast to happen for the remainder of this fiscal year. I'm seeing here \$67 million in rental supports. Can the minister provide some clarity, then, of how much went out in the wake of us passing legislation in this House in July, a full business quarter after the pandemic hit? That was for the commercial rent assistance program. How much went out sort of retroactively for that first-wave response, and how much is forecast for the rest of the fiscal year? That's the first piece of the question.

3:00

The second piece of the question is: can the minister table, first of all, the documents of how many folks accessed that in the first wave and then table what the provincial policy is to respond to the new federal initiatives in their rewrite of the commercial rental assistance program, knowing what we know now about the first one? A lot of small businesses weren't super happy with it. What is our criteria? Do we need legislative change? Has any of that money moved out the door? Is there a fed-prov agreement? How many businesses are going to avail themselves of it?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. We had budgeted \$67 million in the commercial rent assistance program as the provincial share of a joint federal-provincial program. I believe that to date we are almost fully spent on the \$67 million. I believe that we have spent approximately \$64 million to date. My officials can confirm that. We recognize that there were some challenges with that program and the way that the federal government put it together. We felt that it was important that we participate in it, but we recognize there were some challenges. As the federal government has talked about and, in fact, is working on implementing a new program, our advocacy was to ensure that a new program would require less tape and bureaucracy, would be more transparent and ultimately more accessible to those businesses that ultimately are facing a very difficult economic challenge.

Ms Phillips: If I'm to understand correctly, then, approximately \$64 million has been expended so far in the fiscal year. Can the minister give some sense of how many businesses availed themselves of that program?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have that number in front of me, but we will provide the member opposite with that number.

Ms Phillips: If I am to understand correctly, then, the vast majority of those funds for rental supports have been expended already in the fiscal year, so that forecast, then, is the total amount that is forecast for business rental supports. If I am to understand correctly, then, as the federal government brings in a new rental support program, there will not be a provincial share; it will simply be the offering of the federal program without any specific Alberta public policy or any other agreement that has been executed with the federal government?

The Chair: The hon. minister of jobs.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Chair. Just to follow up and build on the Minister of Finance's previous response, we've had 14,608 tenants take advantage of the program and utilize this. These small businesses employ almost 120,000 Albertans. We've had some significant uptick in that program. This is in partnership with the federal government on it. We're continuing to work with the federal government on the new initiative here going forward, and we'll continue to work with the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board on new initiatives here to support small businesses.

Ms Phillips: Okay. Moving on, then, in the first-quarter update there was a section in there around federal transfers, not really transfers but federal support initiatives, for the response to the first wave in the form of the CERB at \$10 billion coming into Alberta at that time and the wage benefit support program – I can't remember the acronym – at \$11 billion, the wage replacement, as it was commonly referred to. I don't see those numbers in the second quarter, but I'm wondering if they are somewhere that I did not see them under other federal transfers and if there could be some clarity there.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Chair. At this point in time we don't have the updated numbers basically outlining the number of participants that have taken advantage of CERB or the federal wage subsidy program. Those were programs that were provided by the federal government, and many Alberta businesses and Albertans took advantage of those.

Madam Chair, after decades of sending hundreds of billions of dollars in net fiscal transfers to Ottawa, it's about time when some of this money starts to come back out west in our great time of need.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I agree. Having said that, that's \$21 billion that came into the province over, you know, four months. As those programs change, it's going to be important for us to watch that change and know how our provincial public policy can fill those gaps that are being left as the federal government rolls over and changes and ends many of those programs. Knowing the extent to which the Alberta economy is still availing itself of the sort of CERB 2.0 that the federal government did and any other wage replacement is a really important piece for not just our

COVID response but then our recovery because we will know just the extent to which we are seeing weakness in the provincial economy and where we can apply specific programs to help people.

That's where I'm going next, which is around – I have seen a number of things in the second-quarter fiscal update around the softness in the employment numbers and some of the loss of economic growth in GDP. Obviously, some of this is to be expected in most corners of the world, but certainly we are seeing it worse here in Alberta relative to other provinces. One of the places we see that is in mortgages in deferral. I'm wondering if the minister has been briefed either by his officials or by the CMHC on numbers of mortgages in deferral – the most updated numbers I saw were 1 in 5 Alberta mortgages in deferral; I guess that is the right way to characterize that – and where I can find in this supplementary supply a consideration for what may happen once that deferral runs out and the knock-on effect in either property tax revenue, employment, even things like the relative health of the ATB, other initiatives. This is a very serious matter when that many Albertans get behind on their mortgage payments.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Just to respond to the comments of the member opposite around the federal wage subsidy and CERB program, the federal wage subsidy, I believe, is going to be in operation until June 2021, and the CERB program was rolled into the federal EI program, so that program will continue. I would just like to point out to all members in the House that EI is, ultimately, a federal fiscal transfer program that Alberta has disproportionately contributed to far in excess of what we've withdrawn. Again, we are seeing a period of time here where Albertans are benefiting from that program, and I would say that it's about time that funds start coming west.

With respect to mortgage deferrals, you know, the member opposite is certainly implying that many Albertans have faced great economic challenge. That's true, Madam Chair, and that's why we responded very quickly with our economic recovery plan. Even before that, we responded quickly by working with the ATB and other financial institutions to ensure that deferral options were available. That's why we moved quickly with utility companies and, in fact, doing whatever it took. Part of that is reflected in our supplementary estimates, doing whatever it took to ensure that we could provide deferrals on utility bills as well.

Madam Chair, we're staying in regular contact with ATB officials, monitoring consumer deposits, business deposits, operating line utilization, liquidity levels as well as mortgage deferrals. I can say this, that many of the mortgage deferrals are already starting to be back into payment mode, but we continue to monitor that situation.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have heard about deferrals in a number of instances, a number of areas, for example utility bills. Does this second-quarter fiscal update contain any measures for small businesses to avail themselves of utility forgiveness as a form of assistance if they have to comply with provincial health measures over this fall?

3:10

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would call on the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation to perhaps discuss some of our most recent business support initiatives.

The Chair: The minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the question on this. We've recently provided a second tranche of the relaunch initiative. This is our \$200 million commitment to small businesses that have been impacted by health measures in our province. The initial round had an uptake of over 16,000 small businesses, that have received over \$60 million. The average distribution per small business was about \$3,700.

What we've done now: as new health measures have come in with the second wave of the pandemic, we've put in place a second relaunch grant available to companies that have been impacted by new health orders here in the last few weeks that have seen their revenues dip. We've also lowered the threshold availability from 50 per cent down to 40 per cent so that companies that have been impacted by 40 per cent are now eligible for that relaunch grant. That also goes back retroactively, all the way to the beginning of the program, to impact small businesses that were in between 40 per cent and 50 per cent that didn't quite qualify for the initial program. They now qualify. We're going to retroactively provide cheques to them for that first application.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Thank you. I'm hearing that utility costs are going to be wrapped into an overall eligibility for the small-business grant but that the legislation won't be amended to authorize forgiveness on utility costs. I'm just going to confirm my understanding and move on.

The new federal emergency rent subsidy lockdown support program for businesses affected by provincial health measures – "any public health measures" is, I believe, how it's written in the federal policy – provides a certain amount of support. Many folks out there, you know, who found the initial emergency rent support to be wanting are also looking at this and seeing that at least a 25 per cent top-up on what is being offered from the federal government would be necessary to ensure business continuity. Is a budget in the supplementary supply for a 25 per cent top-up for businesses forced to close as a result of provincial health orders, whether it's in-person group fitness classes or other businesses that have already been subjected to second-wave provincial health orders?

Mr. Schweitzer: I'll happily answer any follow-up questions that the member may have on this. I'll do my best to try and answer the question. The way we've structured the relaunch grant is based on revenue. If they see a revenue drop of 40 per cent as a result of these new health measures and the impacts of the COVID situation, then they would then qualify for the relaunch grant. Remember that there are two payments, and there's up to \$10,000 of support for small businesses. They can still apply for the first tranche, and if they're impacted by these new measures, they can apply for the second tranche. If they missed the first round, they can still apply now for up to \$10,000 of support, depending on how much revenue they had and how they've been impacted.

Ms Phillips: I'm just going to confirm my understanding, then, that nothing specifically on the rent – again, the grant piece has been doubled and the eligibility has been changed, which was good. That is the commitment that is contained within these budget documents.

The next piece that I want to ask about is the billion dollars from the federal government around the oil and gas well rehabilitation program and the oil services jobs that it is supposed to create. I'm seeing – and I want to confirm my understanding – that we've got \$420 million in this fiscal moving and the balance moving out in

subsequent time. I'm wondering what the plan is here to move that money and get people to work quickly.

I can appreciate that this is a complex matter, but I can also appreciate that we have double-digit unemployment. I can also appreciate that you're dealing with both the AER and the Orphan Well Association and the private-sector operators and the federal government, and that brings its own level of fun. I appreciate those complexities. I really do.

Having said that, having grown up in an oil and gas family – my dad worked in the oil service; he worked on oil rigs – I can also appreciate the kind of urgency that people are feeling in this kind of downturn that is so severe. It is like the early '80s. It is like the family I grew up in. You know, the bureaucratic explanation of, "It's really hard and the AER and the private sector and the blah, blah, blah" is cold comfort, I think, for those folks that are looking for jobs. We have a billion dollars, and we're trying to get it out the door. Over the summer it was reported that the program was experiencing difficulties and all of those things. Is there a specific secretariat or other convening organism within government to get that money out the door and get paycheques into people's hands for an honest day's work out there in the oil and gas sector? I want to see a plan. I want to know how many humans are working at it. I want to know how many families that that's benefiting.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Chair. The member opposite certainly puts it well in that many in the oil and gas service sector are hurting these days, and that's why we worked hard to leverage a billion dollars of Alberta's money back into this province from the federal government to roll out this site rehabilitation program. Energy has a dedicated team.

The Chair: Hon. members, that concludes our first 20-minute block.

We'll move into the second 20-minute block. Did you want to allow the minister to answer the question in that time? Yes?

Ms Hoffman: Sorry?

The Chair: Did you want the Finance minister to finish the question on the first block?

Ms Hoffman: We'll get to that again if that's okay. Yeah.

The Chair: And did you want to share your time with the minister's?

Ms Hoffman: If she's open to that, that would be great.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect. Your time starts now.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleagues for this opportunity to engage in consideration of the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund. Where I'm focusing my energy is on pages 31 through 33 primarily, because they're the Education supplementary supply estimates requested.

I guess the first question I just want to start with is: we all know that this has been an unusual year and probably the most difficult September that anyone has experienced, and while it was a tad late, it was better than never. We were grateful, I think, as Albertans, probably on both sides of the aisle, that the federal government did make a commitment in August to allocate \$262 million to support the safe re-entry of school, so I was expecting to see \$262 million reflected in the supplementary supply estimates here, but it is far

less, about \$144 million when it comes to the actual operating pieces that are all broken down where there is reference to the government of Canada allocation. I'm just hoping the minister can explain to us why we don't see \$262 million, why we only see \$144 million.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you for the question. Yes, you are correct; the federal government did allocate \$263 million over the course of a full year. Of course, we were only provided half of that funding initially.

What I would say is, you know, we were very strong in advocating for funding from our federal government to support our school re-entry program. That being said, as a province we have committed three-quarters of a billion dollars already to support going back to school, and when you look at the funds and the lines there, what you are referring to was the fact that we did have a reallocation of funds, a redirection in the spring, so that is captured in those dollars that you were mentioning. That redirection did go to our COVID response.

As well, when you look at all of the line items – and I don't see the page number, but it's the supplementary amounts by program – you will see that every line item has an increase, so I'm very happy to say that we have been providing a strong support to our school system between all of the line items that you see in base funding, in learning support funding, in all of the funding items there, including reserve funding of \$363 million, an overall budget increase of \$120 million, again, three-quarters of a billion dollars total support to our education system.

Ms Hoffman: I appreciate that the minister was talking about the significant reductions to board allocations, \$128 million in the spring, but my question is specifically about the \$262 million that was committed. This budget was passed before the – I'm not even talking about the \$128 million right now. I'm just talking about the \$262 million from the federal government. Why isn't it reflected in the money that is being requested to be spent here today? It should be \$262 million that was reported to be coming in. I'd like to talk a little bit about the \$250 million versus \$262 million, but I expected that there would be \$262 million in this budget, and it actually works out to \$144 million, so where is the missing federal money?

3:20

Member LaGrange: Again, I will say that the \$262 million is reflected there because there was the additional offset of the redirection of the \$128 million that was saved in the spring during that short-term interruption in funding to school divisions. Therefore, those monies have been redirected to the COVID response.

Ms Hoffman: I wasn't even asking about the \$128 million. I was asking about the federal revenue that was transferred to the province of Alberta. Being told that that . . .

Member LaGrange: Because of the accounting, that's the way . . .

Ms Hoffman: Just the \$262 million. In all accounts there should be \$262 million and \$128 million as an additional reduction. But okay. Let's talk about the \$262 million. So originally . . .

Member LaGrange: If I could just answer that.

Ms Hoffman: Third time. Let's try.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Sorry. Okay. Just to further clarify, the \$262 million will be fully put out to school divisions. We've already put out half that; \$250 million total will be put out as a result of it, and \$6 million is going to be allocated in this term, 4.6 per cent, to support school authorities seeing large enrolment growth. So it is all going out there. The difference is an accounting difference, and it is just because of that \$128 million offset. Hopefully, that explains that.

Ms Hoffman: A \$128 million cut. What the government said previously was that \$12 million was going to be allocated – that's the difference between the \$250 million and the \$262 million – for specific increased online enrolment growth.

Member LaGrange: Totalling \$6 million in the half year.

Ms Hoffman: So the minister is now saying that \$6 million for . . .

Member LaGrange: A half year. We're only going a half year; \$12 million total.

The Chair: Hon. members, just a reminder to direct the comments through the chair.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair. The minister is saying that there is only \$6 million. I know that parents are desperate for money to be meeting the needs of the increased pressures that students are facing in schools and want to see the federal money flow quickly and efficiently, and there is a lot of concern that we've failed to hire additional staff. While I know that this is about the consolidated provincial estimates, I'm hoping that the minister, either now or perhaps through tablings later this week, can report to us on the net staffing changes by classification – teachers, support staff, custodial staff – as a result. What is the net staffing change between what last year's budget was and this year's budget is, through you, Madam Chair?

Member LaGrange: This is about supply, and I don't have those items in front of me right now.

Just to clarify on the federal funding, the federal government is providing the funding in two phases. For Alberta, the first phase, which was 50 per cent, was \$131.4 million, which was provided in September. Phase 2 is expected in early 2021, but that is contingent on all of the metrics being met by our school divisions. In the distribution phase we distributed 95.4 per cent, which was \$175 per student. We did it on a per-student basis, so \$125.4 million was distributed. An additional \$6 million, or 4.6 per cent, was allocated to support school authorities that are seeing large enrolment growth. If you double that, you will see the \$262.8 million total that you're referring to, so it is all accounted for.

Ms Hoffman: I appreciate that context. The question specifically is about net staffing changes between last year and this year. Presumably, with the new federal funds there should be at least some increase to account for that. It's fine if she doesn't have it today, but will the minister table in this House what the net staffing changes are for each of the staff groups identified – teachers, support staff, custodial staff – in terms of meeting the demands of COVID? Clearly, this is documented in the supplementary supply, being that almost every dollar in here is about the COVID response. There should be some increased staffing costs if there are increased funds. Will the minister table that in this House later this week or at her earliest convenience? When can we expect to get that information about this budget and how these funds are actually being allocated?

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. As the hon. member knows, schools divisions: they're actually the employers, and they're the ones that are in charge of staffing, et cetera. Every dollar that we have allocated towards school divisions has been provided to school divisions to provide that response. As I said earlier, three-quarters of a billion dollars to date, and if more is required, we have made the commitment that we will be looking to provide schools with those supports. I can itemize all those items for her, but that being said, school divisions are the ones that are the employers, and they are making the staffing decisions for their school divisions.

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely. Having been both former trustees and board chairs, I get that. Staffing on the ground flows from funding from the province, and as the Minister of Health I certainly stood and answered for what was happening in terms of total staffing, and I know that the Minister of Health does today, too, in terms of total complement for registered nurses, LPNs, physicians. He reports that information regularly to this House even though he's not technically the employer, just like the minister is not technically the employer for school authorities, the local school boards are. Will the minister commit to sharing that information with this House?

The other question I have, that relates to this topic somewhat, is that the minister referred to \$12 million, in two \$6 million chunks, being withheld for jurisdictions that saw increased enrolment. The vast majority of districts I've spoken with, almost all, have said that their enrolment wasn't as much of an increase as they expected, that there are many students that are missing that they expected to see. Will the minister commit to sharing, either now would be great or later this week through tablings, the list of school authorities that saw that increased enrolment and that are receiving the \$6 million that's being asked for in today's consideration?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Oh, sorry. Thank you for the question. I'm just eager to respond.

We are still awaiting final number counts from school divisions. Once school divisions are able to provide us with those final number counts, we will be looking to distribute that additional \$12 million, of which we only have half at this point in time, so \$6 million, to those school divisions that have seen additional growth and have provided online programming for students. Again, we do not have those numbers at this point in time.

Ms Hoffman: Which I find troubling, Madam Chair, because every year until this year there was a September 30 head count, and I'm sure that this year there was also a September 30 head count, at least for internal purposes if not for outward reporting. For the minister to withhold millions of dollars that could be used for students right now: I think it's fair for the public – I know the announcement was made by the government of Canada in August. I mean, we wish it would have been earlier, but better late than never. But now we need to see that money flowing, and we need to know – we have every right, I would say, as stewards of the public purse – to ensure that that money is flowing to those additional jurisdictions. There has always been a September 30 head count. Will the minister commit to sharing with us where the increased enrolment was, that she is withholding these funds from being allocated out to schools, so we can ensure that they're there immediately to serve the needs of students?

Member LaGrange: As the hon. member knows, we are in a COVID pandemic. We had school divisions that approached us who wanted flexibility and a little bit more time to gather those

numbers because of fluctuations in their counts. We also provided additional time to school divisions because of PUF funding for PUF students, special-needs students that they had. They required additional time to do assessments, et cetera, so we gave that flexibility to school divisions. We are now awaiting those number counts and anticipate having them, hopefully, early in December but, again, wanting to give maximum flexibility. As the hon. member can appreciate, given the extenuating circumstances, school divisions really appreciate that flexibility.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair. What they'd also appreciate is funding to be able to actually deliver the increased supports that were announced three months ago. I sincerely hope that – the minister just said that the information will be available to her in early December. Will the minister commit to tabling that information here in this House so that we can all know where the increased enrolment is?

Jurisdictions keep reporting to me and publicly at their meetings that they're missing students all across this province, that there are students who have Alberta Education registration numbers that have not registered in schools. Does the minister have that number handy? Can she tell us how many students are missing that should be registered in school right now, and have they done their analysis as to where they are? I fear that there could be even more students in need of more supports than what we are aware of today.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. I can assure everyone here that full funding has flowed to school divisions. The required funding is out there and in play. The federal funding: actually, we were one of the first provinces to ensure that our school divisions and school authorities actually got that federal funding prior to even the federal funding coming to us as a province. Very happy to reiterate that piece as well as the fact that we have been monitoring the situation, as have all school divisions, in terms of the student counts.

3:30

We are continuing to wait for the finalized school counts from all our school authorities, but we do recognize that a number of parents have chosen to keep their ECS and kindergarten children at home, knowing that it is voluntary to put them into the school system. Again, we continue to monitor the situation, and we'll have finalized counts very, very soon.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. Will the minister table those counts in the House? I have a grave concern that there are thousands of students who are entitled to an education in this province who aren't receiving one right now, so it would be great to know. I appreciate that this has been a very challenging year for local school authorities and for all Albertans, but I would appreciate knowing that the government is doing due diligence. Students have potentially lost three months of educational opportunities already this year, and I would like to ensure that we move quickly to ensure that they get the supports they need to support their learning. If the minister would commit to tabling that information in this House as soon as she's received it, that would go a long way, I think, to helping us all feel confident that students are receiving the supports that they deserve and the education that they're legally entitled to.

I also want to recognize that yesterday the announcement was made around moving to online for grades 7 through 12. I know that emergency remote home learning in the spring was a challenge. One of the things that was raised by many jurisdictions outside of Edmonton and Calgary and Red Deer was the challenge with reliable Internet. Specifically, the announcement referenced online, so what types of additional supports and resources are going to be put in place to ensure that students – and it won't just be 7 through 12. We know that K through 6 will also be doing an online portion, according to the Premier's announcement yesterday, in January. How are we going to ensure that they can actually learn online, students all across Alberta and especially those who don't have access to reliable Internet services in rural communities?

Member LaGrange: Okay. Well, thank you for the question. Again, we are working with all our school authorities to ensure that they have the proper supports that they require. I know that Service Alberta has been looking to improve broadband connectivity across this province as well, and we're continuing to improve those measures.

Again, I'm not sure how all of these questions relate to estimates, the number counts and connectivity, but happy to assure all Albertans that we continue to monitor the situation right across Alberta to ensure that every student has the ability to have that excellent education that we're able to provide for them. I know that school divisions have been preparing since early March, since we, you know, had to go to teacher-directed online learning. We were able to develop a plan together with our education partners through the guidance of the chief medical officer of health. We have come up with a very, very robust plan that is working, and I'm sure the member opposite celebrates with the rest of Albertans that we've been able to keep transmissions within our schools really, really low, 0.1 per cent. That means that 99.9 per cent of students and staff are currently, today, COVID free. I'm sure that the member opposite really celebrates with us on that point.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much. The chief medical officer of health also said that 13 per cent of our schools have active COVID cases in them today. That's the other part of the story. We certainly don't want any student or staff or, in turn, their family or community members to be negatively impacted by COVID.

The reason why I ask the questions about online connectivity is because we're here considering documents that were prepared before the announcement was made, likely, but they were tabled in this House around the same time the announcement was made. Specifically, pages 32 and 33 are about the re-entry plan and costs related to that.

There have been three different situations – I'm happy to answer the minister's question about how it relates. It's what she's asking us to allocate money for, to support students in schools and students learning remotely in response to COVID. It's pages 32 and 33 of the documents that we're here considering.

I was told that the minister committed that there will be no staffing reductions or budget cuts as a result of yesterday's announcement, and I would like her commitment reflected in this place. I know that there was a commitment made that that would be the case back in the spring, and that wasn't followed through on. There was indeed \$128 million cut from transfers. I would like the minister to confirm that there will be no further reductions – there have already been too many – to allocations for supporting student learning in the province of Alberta. That's the first one.

The other question that I have – time is limited. The second one that I'll ask the minister to respond to is around today in question period. I was relieved to hear her say that there will be exemptions put in place for disabled students, students who have a variety of social, cognitive, physical disabilities, to ensure that they can continue their programming despite the order that was issued yesterday about grades 7 through 12. I hope that we can get confirmation for that. How are we going to ensure fair allocations to ensure that equity is actually the driver in light of pages 32 and 33 that are being proposed here today? I did hear the minister say that in question period. Can she confirm that there will be exemptions made for students?

Of course, there are complexities because sometimes students are in congregated sites or congregated classes, and sometimes students are in inclusive learning environments. What is being done through this additional allocation being requested here today? Again, already, I would say, families are incredibly strained. But how are we actually going to fund that need, and how will we be accountable to this House and to Alberta parents and students that we're fulfilling that commitment that the minister made today?

The Chair: The hon. minister. Ten seconds.

Member LaGrange: First of all, I've already been very clear. I was on a teleconference with all school divisions and school authorities to say that full funding will continue, and there will be no reductions whatsoever.

Special needs. We have made the commitment for an exemption for those special-needs students to continue with in-school learning. Parents will have to contact their school authorities to work that out.

I'm glad that the member opposite celebrates with us that our provincial commitment to education for COVID-related items for this particular year has been three-quarters of a billion dollars and that school boards have the flexibility to use it where they see the greatest need so that it has the greatest impact for students. Very pleased to share that and to continue to work with school divisions to ensure that we have and that they have the resources to ensure that students and staff are safe. Just very, very pleased to share that good news.

The Chair: Okay. We are now on the third 20-minute block of the 60-minute mark. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Bilous: I would.

The Chair: That is amenable? All right. Your 20 minutes start now.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I've got questions that will go to the Minister of Finance, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, and to the Minister of Energy, so however the government decides who they put up to respond.

My first question is just around the COVID scenario that this fiscal update is based on. There are four months left in the fiscal calendar, and it's crucial to have a good understanding of the scenario that we're in. Because we haven't seen detailed modelling from Alberta Health in months, you know, what we're looking for here is that, obviously, the economic forecast is going to be affected by the outbreak. Now, I would imagine that spending money on a COVID response will depend on detailed modelling that has clear expectations of how many cases you folks are projecting over the next four months and beyond. So my first question: was the economic forecast for Q2 prepared with COVID-19 modelling?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. What I can say is that the economic assumptions that were used for the Q2, or mid-year, report, the fiscal update, did include a scenario where we're continuing to deal with COVID-19 within the province, continuing to deal with the pandemic, and continuing to deal with the economic effects around the world.

With respect to our energy price projections our department developed their projections. They tested those projections against multiple private-sector projections. Certainly, our department projections were quite conservative, again recognizing that we are in a period of unprecedented uncertainty, certainly in modern times. I would challenge any member of this House to accurately predict where we're going with COVID and COVID cases. Now we've brought in public health measures that I'm confident will have a very positive effect on the trajectory of this pandemic, but in terms of assumptions used for a mid-year report, we are expecting to continue to combat COVID for the rest of this fiscal year and into the next fiscal year for a time.

3:40

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you to the minister. I'm not asking you to have a crystal ball, but I know that the government does do modelling and use at least projections, assumptions. My first question is: will you table those models or scenarios that the department has prepared for you? I'll let you respond as soon as I ask another question here, Minister.

Jumping over to some of the stimulus spending, we've heard that money is going slowly out the door. We've seen this in infrastructure spending but also in targeted programs, where we see stimulus dollars being pushed back or delayed. Now, if I recall correctly, for the capital plan \$10 billion was announced, but only \$8.2 billion is ready to go. I'm curious to know what steps you're taking to improve the process to get the fiscal stimulus out the door so that we can help Albertans through these very, very difficult times. Now, I know that in other jurisdictions they often have a secretariat that helps to ensure that money does go out the door. I know we don't here in Alberta, but, Minister, if you can just comment on: what measures will you take to ensure that the stimulus is getting out to Albertans as quickly as possible?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. That is a fair question. We recognize the urgency to move forward with our economic stimulus for two reasons: one, to get on with ensuring that this province has the required infrastructure to position it for economic recovery and, two, and even more importantly, to provide Albertans with an opportunity for a job. We also have to balance that need for urgency with the need to be fiscally responsible and respect taxpayer dollars, to ensure that when we roll out these programs, when we move forward on an infrastructure project, in fact, we're doing it in a way that maximizes value.

I can say this. In my conversations with the Infrastructure minister and the Transportation minister they're working hard to balance those two priorities, to ensure we're respecting taxpayer dollars but at the same time moving forward as quickly as possible to get the projects going so that Albertans can have a job opportunity. You know, with an example of one or two infrastructure projects that I'm familiar with, I know that Transportation is busy out purchasing land and property right now, which is a precursor to seeing dirt fly this spring. I can assure the member opposite that ministers on this side of the House are aware of the urgency, but they're also balancing that with

the responsibility to deliver well and to deliver efficiently and with value to Alberta taxpayers.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. Thank you, Minister. I'm not sure. You didn't comment on whether you'll table some of the modelling that you've received thus far. I'll just remind you ahead of this next one.

Jumping over to site rehabilitation on page 37, line 6.1, you received a billion dollars from the federal government for site rehabilitation projects to create jobs here in Alberta in the oil and gas sector. In the current supply your plans are to spend \$420 million this fiscal year. That's despite the fact that, obviously, we all know that COVID has hit Alberta really, really hard. I know that other provinces have also received the \$1 billion commitment. Now, in the summer as reported, the program thus far was poorly implemented and was taking too long for applications to be processed. I'm curious to know if these issues have been fixed. As well, you know, why aren't we getting more of the funds out the door?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. The site rehabilitation program, of course, is a new program for the province, and Energy worked very hard to get it up and running as quickly as possible. When it was rolled out, very admittedly it required adjustments as it went forward. One positive was that this program – Energy wisely rolled this program out in rounds so they could make adjustments to the program. Not only that, but Energy set up an industry advisory committee, which has been providing advice to the government on the site rehabilitation program. Again, Energy has grappled with the challenge of rolling out a brand new program, building a brand new program, rolling it out quickly but also rolling it out so it's efficacious, so it actually results in maximum reclamation activity, in maximum job creation, and in a way that most engages existing energy companies as they go about cleaning up their well sites and improving their balance sheets.

Madam Chair, what I can say is that the member raises a valid point given that our projections in our mid-year report reflect the expectations from energy in terms of the rollout of this program and in terms of the timeline for reclamations to take place and thereby the expenditure to incur.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. I know that for the provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan, they have completely planned out and mapped out, with clear targets and criteria, how the dollars would be allocated and what outcomes they're anticipating.

To the minister. I'd like to know how many jobs were created this year. What is the forecast for jobs created next year with the spend? I'd also like to know – and there must be modelling that the Department of Energy has done as far as the effect of spreading out the \$1 billion over three years versus deploying it all at once. I appreciate that the minister did touch on the fact that by doing it in tranches, the department can look at what's working well and make improvements on that, but I'm more curious as to how many companies have been assisted thus far or taken part in this.

As well to the minister: what geographical areas are these wells predominantly in? Are they spread out throughout the province? Are they concentrated in one region or another?

Finally, on this topic, Minister, if there are any agreements that have been made between the feds and yourselves and any of our

Crown corporations like the AER and others, if those agreements can be tabled or shared with the Assembly.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair. I can report to the member opposite that as of November 20, \$255 million in grant funding has been approved and is being allocated to 440 Alberta-based companies, creating just over 1,200 jobs so far this year, year to date, and recognize that, you know, as this program rolls out, my expectation would be consistent with any new program rollout, that there will be efficiencies found and the program can be implemented exponentially quicker and more efficiently as time goes on.

With respect to any agreements affecting the AER what I can say is that relative to the federal program, there are no official agreements required. With respect to this program our goal is to ensure that we can see as many sites as possible be fully reclaimed and that we can put a maximum number of Albertans to work in the energy service industry.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for that detailed answer. I do greatly appreciate it. We look forward to getting updates in the subsequent years as far as additional companies and jobs as we move forward.

I've got one more question for the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, and then I'll jump over to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. On page 37, expense 6.3, going back to utility payment deferral programs now, the loans outlined in the line item are interest-free loans to utility companies that are – I mean, they're allowed to charge interest to Albertans that were in need for their utility costs, but I'm curious if you can tell us how many dollars in interest are being charged to Albertans enabled by these interest-free loans from the taxpayer.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair. We may need to provide additional information to the member opposite as I don't believe I have all of that here today. What I can say about the loan deferral program, firstly, is that our utility deferral program was critical in early days as there was so much uncertainty and fear amongst Albertans, rightly so, as we really didn't know what the pandemic held. We really didn't know how deep the economic challenge would be. We believed it was important to work with utility partners across the province to ensure that there were deferral options. Those deferral options were significantly subscribed by Albertans. In order to get this accomplished, it required the Alberta government to put up a loan of \$104 million. That's reflected in the financial transactions of supplementary supply today, and we will work to provide the member opposite with additional information.

Mr. Bilous: Great. I appreciate that . . .

The Chair: The hon. member.

3:50

Mr. Bilous: I'm very excited, Madam Chair.

I appreciate that response and am looking forward to getting details on the amount of interest that was charged for that.

Jumping over to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, just to recap, earlier my colleague asked about the emergency commercial rent assistance program, the \$67.2 million. If you could just repeat. I believe, Minister, you had said that all of the \$67.2

million has gone out the door and that it has helped 14,008 – I believe that's what you had said, Minister – businesses in the first round. Can you please just start off to confirm that?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: On this program here we've noted that there are 14,608 – 608 – businesses that have been a part of the program, and almost all of the \$67 million has been disbursed. I think the Minister of Finance noted somewhere around \$64 million, \$65 million is a zone that has been disbursed so far out of that program.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Minister. I appreciate that. Obviously, this was a substantial amount of money that went out the door to help, obviously, with commercial rent assistance, which is critical to helping our businesses in the province. My question is: what is the forecast for round 2? At the moment I don't see dollars allocated for round 2. We know that COVID, this second wave, is hitting businesses as hard if not harder this second round, so I'm curious to know: unless I haven't found it in the documents yet, is there a round 2 for this commercial rent assistance program?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Right now we're just working with the federal government on getting further details. They made an announcement this week regarding some of the frame as to what they're trying to do. We're working through that with them right now to see how they're going to structure that and how that's going to correlate to us here at the provincial level. Details to come. I'll gladly follow up with you, though, if you need any other details as that unfolds. Feel free to reach out to our office as well. It's just not crystalized yet, so it would be premature to put it into this report.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I can accept that and understand that it'll be coming soon and can tell you that the businesses that I've spoken with are desperate for this kind of assistance and need it urgently.

Moving on to the relaunch, I know that you've mentioned it before. I just have a couple follow-up questions, Minister. Obviously there was \$200 million that you folks listed for the relaunch program. You had mentioned this, but if you can just confirm, please, how much has been spent to date and, again, if – I believe you had said \$60 million, but if you can confirm that. How many companies has that assisted thus far?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Member, for the question. We've had over 16,000 applicants that have qualified for the disbursement. The average disbursement is \$3,700, and just over \$60 million has been disbursed today.

Now that we're into our second wave, what we've done is we've reduced the threshold down to 40 per cent of revenue reductions. Originally, the threshold was 50 per cent. We're going to make that retroactive, so if you were an applicant that was initially denied because you didn't quite make it to the 50 per cent threshold but you sat in that 10 per cent bandwidth, you will now qualify, and we're going to distribute those cheques as well. You also would qualify, potentially, if you're impacted by new health orders, for a second round as well.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Excellent.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. So businesses won't have to requalify. They automatically are qualified for round 2. If I understood you correctly, Minister, there's \$140 million in this second round, or is there another \$200 million? I'm curious. When will those funds be available? When does that program start getting out the door?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: We're pretty quick here. We're pretty quick. We're going back and forth. Sorry, Madam Chair.

Just to highlight, applicants actually will have to reapply for the second tranche because there are new health measures. We have to make sure that they qualify for the new health measures. Where I'm saying that it'll be automatic is if you applied for the first round but were denied because you didn't quite make the revenue threshold. There we're going to automatically go through the system to make sure that you qualify and get those cheques out the door right away for them.

As far as the timing goes for the new program, we're working with the coders right now at Service Alberta to get the system up and running. It should be available in early December for people to apply.

Mr. Bilous: You may or may not be able to answer this, Minister, but if the system is going to be up, hopefully, in early December, when do you forecast how quickly dollars will get out the door? I appreciate businesses have to apply. They have to qualify. My hope is that this process will be streamlined. Again, you folks talk about reducing red tape. Here's a great example where red tape could actually put businesses out of business.

Mr. Schweitzer: I appreciate that question. Historically, with the first round most of the applications were processed within, you know, 10 to 14 days. Most of the applications were done and cheques out the door. We're hoping to make sure that we can improve upon that going forward since we do have some lessons learned from the first round. We're hoping to get these cheques out the door in the month of December.

Mr. Bilous: Excellent. Okay, well, I appreciate that answer, and you can count on the opposition to hold you to account on that commitment.

Mr. Schweitzer: Oh, I'm sure.

Mr. Bilous: But, again – and you know this, Minister – businesses are absolutely desperate for assistance so, you know, whatever you can do to get that out the door quickly.

I realize that I only have a couple minutes left in this round. I'm going to jump over to the Ministry of Labour and Immigration. On page 61 the ministry listed \$262 million for WCB deferral and forgiveness. Now, is any of the funding to cover struggling small businesses into the new year? At the moment if I understand this correctly, it's for three-quarters of the calendar year. Will it stop as of January of 2021 or will it continue forward?

The Chair: The hon. minister has three seconds. [A timer sounded] No more seconds. Hon. members, that concludes our 60-minute block. We will now move to private members of the government caucus for a 20-minute block.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Neudorf: I would like to, please.

The Chair: Please proceed. Your time starts now.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to just recognize the extreme challenges that this unprecedented year has had on all the ministers and their budgets. In particular, Health has been at the forefront of the COVID response with numerous challenges, particularly with emphasis on the fiscal for this discussion. I'm just wondering if the minister could please provide some comments on the following couple of questions. How much is the province allocating to the Ministry of Health to support Alberta's COVID-19 response? I know we had the first \$500 million. To follow that up: how, exactly, will funding allocated to the province's COVID-19 response be used within those values?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and to the hon. member. The updated estimate is of \$1.7 billion, which includes funding of \$500 million that was estimated previously. This total of \$1.7 billion includes a number of items. For example, when it comes to the consumption of PPE, personal protective equipment, in both Alberta Health Services as well as the masks for the mask initiative, where we provided 40 million masks to Albertans throughout the province, as well as some drugs and testing supplies. That total would be \$625 million for that line item. That's probably the most significant part of the \$1.7 billion.

Contact tracing and lab testing is the second-largest item. They together would be \$344 million. The safe restart program is potentially going to be providing some amounts for that. This line item would include all of the amounts that relate to the testing, including the assessment centres that AHS had set up throughout the province, the contact tracing as well as the data management that was required for both the testing and the contact tracing.

Then the third-largest line item is \$271 million for continuing care. This includes funding for our continuing care operators, for enhanced staffing, extra cleaning supplies, lost accommodation revenue, as well as increased health care aide staffing levels. There was a \$2 top-up wage – you'll remember, Madam Chair – and paid student practicum positions. As well, there was additional funding for all the AHS long-term care as well as designative supportive living operated facilities throughout the province. Now, the additional funding for AHS, long-term care, and DSL – that was in that \$271 million – is \$45 million for that.

4:00

There is also \$95 million for other incremental operating costs for AHS. There was \$94 million for AHS for staff redeployment, primarily for the staff redeployed from the surgical initiative. There is \$74 million for physician compensation. Actually, you're going to see in the physician compensation and development line item in the expenses one of the reasons why the amount there is a little bit less, because some of the physician compensation is actually included in this \$1.7 billion for responding to COVID. A bunch of other line items are included in this \$1.7 billion, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to the hon. member for his question.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for that detailed response. I appreciate that.

The next set of questions I have is in regard to our preparedness. Obviously, there are so many unknowns with this pandemic. I think the Minister of Finance alluded to that. The predictability has been incredibly challenging. We know that cases go up and then they

flatten and then they go up again, but precise numbers are very much more difficult to come by. In terms of that, does the Minister of Health know that these funds will be enough to properly respond to COVID in the sense of with their best projections? Are we going to have to provide additional dollars? Maybe in part of this response if he can also talk a little bit about the preparedness that Alberta took at the very beginning. I know there were significant efforts to purchase PPE, ventilators at the time, and different things like that as well as, if possible, if he wouldn't mind touching upon how this compares to other provinces. I think it speaks well to the intent and focus and work that has been done by his ministry to not only allocate funding but prepare possible projections to such the extent that they were able to share with other provinces equipment at different times. Again, all of those questions related to that one topic.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, the amounts are based on our current forecast, but we do know that the response to the pandemic is constantly evolving. It's a dynamic situation. We will have to closely monitor the impact of COVID on the province, including the health system, to continue to respond and make sure we're working very closely with AHS and make sure that they have all of the resources that they need. We'll continue to be responsive in our efforts to protect the health and wellness of Albertans, make sure that everybody who needs critical care is going to be receiving it throughout the pandemic.

When it comes to preparedness, Madam Chair, I'm happy to answer that as well. We did begin work in January, February, as the hon. member said, to begin to purchase personal protective equipment, PPE, knowing that the rest of the world was having shortages. We used our purchasing power in one integrated system here in Alberta to be able to buy not just enough PPE for that first wave but also for future waves, including now. So we're thankful to have those stockpiles that we were able to accumulate early in the year.

We also were able to quickly expand our contact tracing and testing capacity throughout the province, the innovation that was shown by AHS to develop the PCR test, the molecular test, to be able to be done here in Alberta, for us to make sure that we had enough supply of reagent, that we were investing in 3-D printers as well for us to have the swabs that are going to be needed for our testing capacity, and to buy new equipment, so millions of dollars, tens of millions of dollars, in new equipment to be able to ensure that we had the testing capacity throughout the pandemic.

The member is correct that we watched while our partners in other provinces were having shortages in their PPE. We heard the call to start assisting our fellow provinces, so yes, some of our PPE was donated early in the year to other provinces who were in need. As well, ventilators were lent to some other provinces. We're very proud of that.

A lot of the solutions were made here in Alberta, Madam Chair. I should give a shout-out to a company called Exergy Solutions, who worked to develop a new type of ventilator. It was quite astounding that somebody was able to that quickly design a new ventilator that had never been designed that way before, to get approvals from Health Canada and very quickly manufacture 200 of these to donate using funds that were provided from Suncor, actually. An amazing example of some of the ingenuity and our many different partners throughout Alberta who helped us be able to respond so quickly to the pandemic.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thanks, Madam Chair. The next set of questions I have has to do with our next focus, particularly in terms of the vaccine. My primary question for the minister: is the cost of the COVID-19 vaccine part of this supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Health? Beyond that, obviously, I'm sure that every Albertan is looking forward to the day where it's as simple as taking a vaccine and then going back to ordinary life. How many doses would be included in that purchase, if he's able to provide those numbers?

Then if he can speak at all to additional doses that may be required, the numbers that might be required for the province, when we would expect to see those vaccine doses, and possibly even the order of how that would be administered if it's appropriate to speak to that. Again, these are questions, I think, fiscally and preparedly, that most Albertans are most interested in, looking forward to the new year and the hope that will hopefully come in the shape of that vaccine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. The fact is that, no, we don't yet include estimates for vaccine purchasing and distribution and provision throughout the province, really just because it's too soon to know the details not just about the procurement, the purchase agreements through the federal government – Canada has entered into purchase agreements with seven different manufacturers who have candidates that are right now in phase 3. The first two that they entered into agreements with were Pfizer and Moderna.

I know off the top of my head, for example, that the Pfizer purchase agreement with Canada was for 20 million doses with an option for 50 million additional. I know that the first tranche of Pfizer doses that we'll be receiving here in Alberta will be, I think, 465,000, and that will be in early 2021. Moderna will be providing Alberta, through the federal government, 221,000. The costs related to those purchase agreements, the cost sharing that we'll be facing with the federal government: those details are yet to come as well as the costs related to the distribution and provision of the vaccines.

These vaccine candidates do require extreme cold storage, which is something that we have to make sure Alberta is ready and Canada is ready for. That's still yet to come, and we look forward to continuing to make sure that when – there are going to be three phases, Madam Chair – the first phase of vaccine distribution does come to Alberta, we're going to have the distribution and provision infrastructure there to be able to provide that to Albertans.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. I appreciate the foresight, the advance planning, and preparedness that this minister has taken through this entire pandemic.

The next set of questions I have for him, for the Minister of Health: what specific programs or initiatives are included as a part of the additional funds being requested in the supplementary estimates? In addition to that, if he can provide some clarity in terms of these programs and initiatives, how long they would last, whether this request is for another full year or for a certain period of time, if he could speak to that.

Then, if they've provided any thought or projections in terms of, once vaccines are being administered, once these programs are being initiated, if they have any forecast on the projected fiscal

response to that. I would hope that they would see the costs reduce again, but again, I don't want to speak pre-emptively to that. But if he could provide any insight on the planning of those programs and the effectiveness they're hoping to see out of that and then how that would impact the costs on an ongoing basis.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. Maybe I'll answer in reverse order. For the length of time these amounts are going to be forecasted: it's really going to be until the pandemic ceases here in Alberta.

For the specific programs, as I mentioned, the most significant is the PPE, the personal protective equipment. That's \$625 million. That included as well the masks initiative that I mentioned as well as all of the personal protective equipment that AHS is consuming throughout the pandemic. There are orders of magnitude increases in the amount of personal protective equipment that is being consumed right now by AHS than they would have seen being consumed in a typical year before this one.

4:10

The second most significant program that's included is, as I mentioned, the lab testing and contact tracing. That's \$344 million for that.

The third is the continuing care funding that we provided, including the \$170 million that we provided to our continuing care operators to make sure that they have the ability for enhanced staffing, extra cleaning supplies, to have the resources needed to protect their staff and their residents.

Those are the most significant of the programs and initiatives that are included in the \$1.7 billion.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, and thank you to the minister. I appreciate his response, again, and the planning and the clarity that he's provided today.

My last question. The original \$500 million that was allocated to the Health budget at the beginning of the pandemic: is that part of the supplementary estimates, and how will that impact these costs going forward? Again, this was related to the last question a little bit. Is it expected that we'll have another requirement for such a large investment to respond just to the pandemic as part of that planning? Other than that, what else can he say about the overall budget that's provided here and the plans moving forward?

Again, thank you, through you to the minister, for his time today.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. It wasn't. The original \$500 million for the COVID pandemic response was part of the ministry's 2020 budget. It was a late addition that was announced on March 15, after the first draft of Budget 2020 was tabled, so that original \$500 million is not included.

I'm happy to talk about further amounts. Both I and our colleague the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addiction have talked about the \$53 million in additional funding for mental health and addiction, including online supports, phone supports, in-person mental health and addiction support. As we've said in this House many times, if one were to take all the additional mental health and addiction funding every other province has provided in the middle of pandemic and multiplied those all by two, that's what this

amount represents here that we have provided in Alberta for mental health and addiction as a response to the pandemic.

There have also been significant capital purchases. As I said, we invested significantly in our lab equipment, including the KingFisher machines that are required for us to be able to process the PCR tests quicker. It also includes a lot of clinical equipment that's required throughout the pandemic. There's also the additional funding required for the emergency operations centres. There's one that's in the ministry, an EOC, but there's in each of the zones a zone EOC, a ZEOC, so each of these emergency operations centres in each of the five zones, and then an emergency communication centre as well in Calgary that is AHS's central command centre.

As well, there are many other initiatives, including virtual health and additional funding for these types of initiatives, Health Link as well, Madam Chair, so we can continue to be as innovative as we can in our response to the pandemic and providing those resources to AHS as it continues to respond to the pandemic and making sure that all Albertans have access to critical care that's needed throughout the pandemic.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to cede the rest of my time to the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be directing my questions to the hon. Minister of Finance. I just wanted to start off by saying that I believe that we are in an unprecedented time, much like everyone else in our province. We know that the real burden of leadership is now, when you see governments having to make extremely difficult positions. As well, many difficult decisions are being made right now. I know that for this Finance minister – I know him personally as well – having to spend at these rates is not something that he would want to do, nor is anybody wanting to put ourselves in this position.

I am very encouraged by the work of the Ministry of Finance and the work of our government to keep our mind on fiscal responsibility because I know that when we were campaigning in 2019 and before that, that was one of the first things that came up at the doors in my constituency: how are we going to get ourselves out of the mess that the NDP left us? Then we toppled a global pandemic on top of that, and we're really just in this position where we need to get our economy back on track but we also need to be focused on those key actions and keeping ourselves focused on fiscal responsibility.

So I was very pleased to see targeted measures taken to restart our economy, including historic investments in irrigation, something that will greatly impact my area of the province and greatly increase our economic, our physical capacity in this province to be able to grow food for the rest of the world, store water, and everything else.

I'm really glad to see in this report that the Ministry of Finance gave yesterday that our province's finances have improved and that actually our increased revenue has led to a \$2.8 billion decrease in the deficit. That is very encouraging news. We know that we can't depend on revenue alone, however, to get us out of this position, and this will require restraint . . .

The Chair: My apologies. That time has now concluded.

We will now go into the 10-minute block with the Official Opposition. Would you like to share your time, hon. member?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, if the minister is amenable.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Agreed.

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

Mr. Shepherd: I had hoped to address my questions to the Minister of Health, so I will go on with my questions. I appreciate the questions that were brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East, which helped to clarify some of the initial questions that I had for the Minister of Health. Now, I would note that he did speak of some specific amounts, of the dollars that had been set aside specifically for the COVID-19 pandemic response, that \$1,192,500,000. He noted in his response to the Member for Lethbridge-East that of that, \$605 million was targeted for PPE and the initial mask initiative. I was wondering if he could provide a breakdown on which amounts, I guess, would be specifically for the PPE for AHS and which would be for the mask initiative specifically, that the government did in the spring.

Mr. Shandro: My memory is that it was a \$4 million initiative, Madam Chair, and \$300,000 was for the distribution of same. Most of that money for the initiative went to purchasing the masks. Many of our partners who helped us with the distribution of those masks did that pro bono for us, whether it was the municipalities, nonprofit organizations, indigenous communities as well as the restaurant partners.

[Ms Glasgo in the chair]

And then the rest of that is for the consumption of PPE that AHS is experiencing, as I said, at least one order of magnitude more in what's being consumed throughout the pandemic than what they would have seen in a previous year. The vast majority of that \$625 million, actually – I think that number that was quoted by the member might have been incorrect – is for the consumption of PPE that AHS will be experiencing throughout the pandemic.

The Acting Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister. There was also the mention, then, of \$344 million for lab testing and contact tracing. Could the minister provide a breakdown of the amounts that were allocated in each of those areas, specifically lab testing, and how much was allocated specifically for contact tracing?

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

4:20

Mr. Shandro: Yeah. Happy to provide that breakdown. I don't have it off the top of my head, Madam Chair, but happy to be able to provide that. A big part of this is also the redeployment that I mentioned and the amounts that were required to help AHS in redeployment programs. The health system, like everybody else's health system throughout the world, really came to a standstill. Our pre-COVID surgical capacity was reduced to about 40 per cent, which we're thankful for, actually, in Alberta. Other jurisdictions like Ontario went down to about 10 per cent of their pre-COVID surgical capacity. A big part of that was many people throughout AHS being redeployed, whether it was the assessment centres, contact tracing, et cetera, so that they could help with that.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

With that in mind, there are other amounts included in this \$1.7 billion that do indirectly also relate to the lab testing, including as well the capital purchases for lab equipment and the redeployment

programs for the contact tracing, Madam Chair. I'm happy to provide that breakdown to the member.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister. Could the minister then clarify: of this ask, then, for just under \$1.2 billion, how much of this is for funds that have already been spent, allocated, and gone out, and how much of this is the contingency? As we know, we are seeing a continuing spike in COVID-19 cases. We are likely to see increasing pressure. How much of these funds are intended for dealing with the remaining, I guess, ongoing issues that are generated by the pandemic through the end of the fiscal year?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Sure, Madam Chair. I'm happy to answer this question again, as I did for the Member for Lethbridge-East. This is our forecast at this present time for the remainder of the fiscal year for the response to COVID-19. As well, on top of the \$500 million that was additionally provided in the revised budget of March 15, 2020, we have committed to many of these programs already. As I mentioned in another answer, that was asked by the Member for Lethbridge-East when he was asking about the vaccines, that is not included in these forecasts at this time because we don't know those amounts, as an example.

But we will continue as we understand that the response to the pandemic is going to continually evolve, and it is a dynamic situation. Our commitment to Albertans is that AHS is going to have all the resources that it needs to be able to respond to the pandemic, and we will continue to work with them to provide them with all the resources that they need in many different programs, whether it's the lab testing, contact tracing, acute care, making sure that we have the capacity in our acute-care system, making sure that we continue to work with AHS and the other operators of continuing care to make sure that the residents and staff will have the resources they need to protect those who are most vulnerable. That's our commitment to Albertans, continuing to respond to the pandemic as the situation evolves.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for that clarification and information.

Moving on just to another section here, looking at page 45, one item that I think perhaps surprised me and perhaps some others was envelope 4 of the supplementary health budget, the drugs and supplemental health benefits section. We see an additional spend of \$127 million. Now, the reason I found that a bit of a surprise is because we know that the government recently changed drug benefits for Albertans so that there were about 60,000 Albertans who would no longer have drug coverage under the seniors' drug benefit in that envelope. At the beginning of the year these were changes, I guess, that had caused many concerns, but now we see that, in fact, the government is spending an additional \$127 million. I was wondering if the minister could just provide some context as to where this extra spending is coming from and what it is being directed to.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. As we know, there are 22 different drug programs that are sponsored by the government. One of them is the coverage for seniors program, the

official name of the seniors' drug plan. It's one of these 22 programs, but we do have many other programs. With the folks who were not seniors who were previously in the seniors' drug plan, we did see an uptick in enrolment in what's called the nongroup plan, so we actually have seen increased enrolment in all of our drug plans throughout the year.

Some of the previously estimated savings related to the biosimilar initiative that was announced last December have been postponed as a result of the pandemic, so, yeah, I've seen increased costs that are related to that postponement of that initiative as well. Those are the most significant two reasons.

The third significant reason for increased spending in drugs for this year that we're estimating is related to the increased cost of drugs, which is what the entire world is seeing right now. We continue to work with the PCPA, the Pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance. This is the entity that was established by Premiers, I think, about a decade ago. We work with the PCPA to make sure that they have the infrastructure and resources to be able to negotiate agreements with new manufacturers who have recently received approvals from either Health Canada or gone through the CADTH process and then received an agreement with the provincial government or listed in a formulary. We need that work to continue to be done so that we know that Alberta taxpayers are getting the best price for the drugs that Albertan patients need for their care, so we'll continue that commitment.

But we do see an increased cost in drugs from the manufacturers continuing, especially as the care is changing as well. We're in a time when we're seeing that new drug therapies are coming online. Gene therapy is the way of the future. Many of these gene therapies are incredibly expensive, but we're going to continue to work with the PCPA to make sure that the process, when there is a new therapy or new drug, because we do hear from many Albertan patients that previous years . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, we will now proceed with the second 10-minute block. Hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, would you like to share your time?

Ms Glasgo: If the minister is so inclined, I would love to share my time with the Minister of Finance.

The Chair: I see a head shaking. Please proceed.

Ms Glasgo: As I was saying before I cut myself off, I would love to talk about fiscal prudence and the need for it right now more than any time. I've noticed that our expenses, not including COVID-19 measures, have decreased by \$156 million from Budget 2020. To me, that is a very good sign of fiscal prudence and a sign that our government really has these priorities in mind. You know, I was talking before about how we know that we can't depend on revenue alone, so I'm really glad to see that our government is taking bold and decisive action, including transformational change within our own ranks, to reduce government spending in other areas. Can the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance please comment on our commitment to lower operating expenses?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Treasury Board and Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. That's a very, very important question because this government inherited a spending trajectory that was increasing 4 per cent per year at a time when revenues were flat, and of course as we all would know in this House, anybody that's certainly managed a business or even a household, that is simply not sustainable.

Madam Chair, this government committed to Albertans during the last campaign that we would bring fiscal responsibility back to the province of Alberta. We also made a commitment to balance the budget in our first term, and I reluctantly state today that given the great economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the resulting crash in energy prices, and the effects of the largest contraction in the global economy since the Great Depression, we will be unable to balance in our first term.

But responsible fiscal management remains a top priority for this government, and we believe that we have a deep responsibility to deliver that in this environment. What I can say is that in Budget 2019 and Budget 2020 we started the Alberta government on a path to fiscal responsibility. It was a credible fiscal plan that would bring down our operating expenditures by just under 3 per cent and ultimately result in a balanced budget by '22-23. The MacKinnon panel pointed out that Alberta is an outlier in our spending on a per capita basis. In fact, their conclusions were that Alberta spends \$10 billion more than comparative provinces on a per capita basis every year in delivering government services. Madam Chair, that's 20 per cent higher than other provinces.

4:30

I am pleased to say that, again, our budget, our fiscal plan that we laid out in Budget 2019 and continued on with in Budget 2020 narrowed that spread. In fact, today, based on a recent StatsCan report, we have brought that per capita discrepancy down in half, to where we are now approximately 10 per cent higher than other provinces. Madam Chair, we cannot afford to be an outlier, so we will continue to move forward with the plans we laid out in Budget 2019 and Budget 2020 in terms of bringing our cost curve down. In fact, in Budget 2021 I believe it will be important to lay out a plan that goes all the way to align our per capita spend with other provinces.

Madam Chair, during this time, when we cannot with certainty predict a new timeline on balancing the budget, that's why we have laid out as a fiscal anchor bringing our cost of delivering government services on a per capita basis to be in line with other provinces. That's why we've also, in order to manage debt levels, brought in as a fiscal anchor the use of the ratio of net debt to GDP. That ratio is an important ratio because it's a predictor of the ability for a jurisdiction to manage debt-service costs in the future. We have also brought in a fiscal anchor of staying well below 30 per cent as a net debt to GDP ratio. We have also committed to bring Albertans a plan and a timeline to balance the budget once we can see our way clear of the pandemic and as economic certainty starts to arrive in the province again.

Further to the member's very good question, we remain committed to bending the cost curve and finding efficiencies in the delivery of government services. We were very pleased to report in our mid-year fiscal update that, in fact, our expenditures were projected to be \$156 million lower than budget and our operating expenditures \$64 million lower than our budget amounts in Budget 2020.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for that detailed answer. I have to say that it's like he was reading my mind, because I'm going to ask him about fiscal anchors again. I wanted to just elaborate on the needs for my constituents. I mean, my constituents are very concerned about overwhelming debt and deficit. For me personally, I'm concerned about passing this on to future generations. I know that the average Albertan is born with thousands of dollars of debt, thanks to

governments' mismanagement and also choices that governments have had to make to keep the province moving.

I understand, Madam Chair, that sometimes we have to spend on key infrastructure projects to create jobs and get our economy moving, but it is important that we have fiscal anchors to maintain our credibility and a set of rules to keep our policy commitments. Governments around the world have had to spend and borrow, and there's no question that we know that. Relief programs have been effective, but they are costly. I was wondering if the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance could elaborate on those fiscal anchors and how they will inform our policy going forward.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair and to the member for that question. I've not been known to be a mind reader, but I would be pleased to talk a little bit further about the fiscal anchor of net debt to GDP. The pre-COVID provincial average across the country of net debt to GDP was approximately 30 per cent. That means that we in Alberta continue to have a relatively strong balance sheet. I believe that maintaining a strong balance sheet is absolutely essential because in order to recover fiscally in this province, it will be important to maintain a reasonably strong balance sheet.

That's why we've adopted the net debt to GDP ratio of under 30 per cent over the fiscal plan. Madam Chair, that will guide our decision-making with respect to infrastructure projects. That will guide our decision-making with respect to economic recovery plans as we know that all of those expenditures at this point in time will require additional borrowing. But we also know that stimulus right now – stimulus projects, infrastructure projects particularly, that provide future Albertans with real value, that position this province for economic recovery and growth, that improve our productivity and competitiveness and will ultimately attract investment into this province, which will lead to long-term sustainable job creation and expanded economic and fiscal capacity, are critically important. Along with that, these kinds of projects will provide tens of thousands of Albertans with real job opportunities at a time when they really need them.

So, Madam Chair, we will continue to move forward with responsible infrastructure investments. At the same time, we will be governed by a net debt to GDP ratio that will provide a fiscal anchor.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Glasgo: Madam Chair, would I be able to have a time check?

The Chair: One minute exactly.

Ms Glasgo: Okay. I will be ceding the rest of my time to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to ask some questions to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: I'm over here.

Ms Goodridge: Fantastic.

Alberta's recovery plan is a bold, ambitious, long-term strategy to build, diversify, and create tens of thousands of jobs now and improve the quality of life for those in the future. Our government acted in unprecedented ways to protect people, and we must do the same with livelihoods. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and

Innovation: can you comment on the necessity of Alberta's recovery plan and the spending associated with it?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thanks to the member for the question. It's almost as though I can turn around and have a conversation, but we're going to do this in the more formal way, where I'll address it through the chair here.

I just really appreciate the opportunity to answer this question about our recovery plan as a whole. We're being strategic in everything that we do here.

The Chair: My apologies. You'll have to do that in the next round.

This next round goes to members of the opposition. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre rising.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have a couple more questions on the Health file, and hopefully we'll be able to receive some information. If not, I would be happy to have the data tabled and forwarded afterwards in writing.

First of all, looking at, again, page 46 of the supplementary supply, another interesting item is envelope 3, which is physician compensation and development. Looking at that amount there, we see a reduction of \$174 million. Now, I know indeed I've heard from many physicians about the challenges they have faced due to COVID-19 and the rather limited billing codes that are available to them for providing virtual care as well as a number of the changes that were put through or forced through by the Minister of Health on April 1 of this year. It would appear that we have I don't know if you want to call it significant but certainly a sizeable reduction of \$174 million in physician compensation. I was wondering if the minister could outline where that reduction is indeed coming from. Did it result from any FTE changes?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. We'll certainly ensure that the Minister of Health receives these detailed questions as well, but I'm pleased to rise and answer.

One phenomenon that we have been witnessing in Alberta during the pandemic is that there have been fewer visits to, certainly, some clinics across the province as Albertans have made decisions to not visit their doctor as often as they might otherwise. That has impacted physician billings, certainly, to some degree. That will likely be certainly part of the response to the member's question.

I would also just like to add, Madam Chair, that we absolutely recognize the great value that physicians are providing Albertans daily during this time of the pandemic. We recognize the great service that Alberta physicians have provided for decades to Albertans, and I just wanted to register that comment on the record as well.

4:40

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the minister. Indeed, I would appreciate it if the Minister of Health is able to offer anything supplementary to that. That would be appreciated as well.

I was wondering if the minister could also just walk us through the reduction of about \$123 million in the balance of expense vote item. I was just wondering if you could outline where the minister indeed found savings in the Health budget given that under the global pandemic I would assume that we are seeing increased challenge across every aspect of the health care system. I'm just wondering where, in the midst of this pandemic, \$123 million in reductions was found. Are these permanent cuts, or would this be a temporary adjustment?

Mr. Shandro: Madam Chair, maybe I'll start with continuing the conversation with physicians and the question the member had related to physician compensation. There are two reasons why physician compensation is estimated to be a little bit lower. Part of it is that throughout the pandemic, throughout the spring, and even after we relaunched the health system on May 4 and we had surgeries coming back, we went throughout the summer trying to get back up to a hundred per cent of our surgical capacity and getting through the backlog of those who had surgeries that were delayed or postponed throughout the spring and getting through over 90 per cent of that backlog throughout the summer and early fall. We're thankful to AHS and our physicians for being able to do that. But, as a result, folks in the spring saw their physicians less.

As well, the second reason is that there are a lot of additional amounts for physician compensation which are actually included in the additional funding for the COVID response, Madam Chair. This relates to, for example, the addition of virtual codes for fee for service for physicians, for them to allow for treatment of their patients virtually instead of in person. Some of that physician compensation is also included in the COVID response, in that line item and not in the typical physician compensation line item. Those two reasons are the biggest reasons why physician compensation is a little bit lower than it is at this time.

I have to admit that I didn't quite understand the member's second question, so maybe I'll let him rephrase, and I'm happy to answer that in a future answer.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for that clarification. Again, I was just referring to the very bottom of the expense vote under Operating Expenses on page 45. At the balance of expense vote we have an amount of \$123,222,000 in reduction there, between the current estimate and the total. I was just wondering if the minister could provide a breakdown or an explanation of where that dollar difference is coming from.

Mr. Shandro: I'm happy to provide an answer to the member for that question.

Mr. Shepherd: If that's the case, then those were all the questions I had at this time. Madam Chair, I will cede the rest of my time to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will start off where my colleague for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview left off, asking about on page 61 the WCB deferral listed at \$262 million in deferral and forgiveness, which is certainly helping struggling small businesses this year. The question is whether the amount here will continue past January 1, 2021, or if it is only to the first three quarters of this fiscal.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The abatement that was provided to small and medium-sized businesses was an abatement for 2020, so that would be the calendar year 2020.

I would like to point out as well that there was a deferral component to that. Again, as I've mentioned earlier and I think we all knew in this House, in early days of the pandemic and great economic challenge there was great need for liquidity. Businesses were extremely concerned about cash flow: cash flow to pay rents, cash flow to pay employees and to meet other obligations. That's why we acted quickly with a full deferral of all WCB premiums for

2020 and, in fact, provided refunds for employers that had already made their remittances.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Specifically, because the government has taken the unprecedented step of helping with that premium support, my question is: has the government considered the implications of the policy change of instructing WCB to return surpluses to corporations, to those employers, given that this year's contributions are from the government through the supports that this has been given rather than – essentially, it is taxpayer dollars here. If there are surpluses, will those be returned to the corporations, or will something else be considered, given the unique circumstances of the year?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the question. That's a great question. I don't have the answer today. However, I can say this. I believe that the most compassionate thing we can do as a government is to assist in job creation right across the province in community after community. I will take this question back to the Minister of Labour and Immigration and provide you with an answer. We'll consider that.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. My next question is on page 62. We show a reduction in spending in line item 3, safe, fair, and healthy workplaces, and that line item is often boots on the ground, whether it's employment standards, occupational health and safety, very important right now, particularly during the pandemic. I was hoping to find out more about that reduction and why that is happening on this line item, particularly now, where I almost expected to see maybe more resources being put into that area.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. I think I'll answer in a broader sweep. I hope it answers the question. With respect to the in-year savings \$1 million in savings consists of reductions in supplies and services, for example, travel, contract services, materials and supplies. This is being achieved with operational efficiencies as well as cost containment measures.

The Chair: We will now move on to the next 10-minute block, starting with the government caucus. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to start back where I had been with the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. I was just wondering if you could comment on the necessity of Alberta's recovery plan and the spending associated with it.

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for that question. We're making sure that everything we do with our recovery plan focuses on three foundational pillars. One is making sure we have the most competitive tax environment in the entire country. That's why we accelerated the job-creation tax cut.

The second foundational element is making sure that we have the most efficient government possible. That's why we've done our red

tape initiative to reduce the regulatory burden by a third, which has saved businesses almost half a billion dollars already with our initiatives to date. We're also making sure we drive down our costs. Before, you know, when there were boom times in Alberta, our costs got out of control, and we had irresponsible spending from the previous government. We have to make sure we get our efficiency of government where it needs to be, to have the most efficient government possible on the regulatory side and on the spending side.

The third foundational element of our recovery plan is dealing with labour and talent, making sure we have the most competitive labour opportunities here in Alberta for people and making sure we have the training opportunities as well and for those that want to retool or reskill, making sure we can shorten that window as well to the shortest possible time for them to get the skill sets they need for the jobs that they're pursuing in the workplace.

As far as the dollars go, Madam Chair, we're making sure that in each of our sector strategies we do the diligence, we do the return on investment in each area. A perfect example of that that I just want to highlight is around agriculture. This is a space that has an immense amount of technology that's being developed. We had an opportunity to visit Olds College and their smart lab that they have there for their farm and the amazing technologies that they're developing, with drone technology, with tractors, and everything else that goes along with it. So we're making sure that we can capitalize on the research here to make sure that we have the right investments going in for jobs of today and tomorrow.

We're also investing in infrastructure. We've invested over \$10 billion, accelerated that to make sure that we have the ability to develop the necessary infrastructure to get people working now, Madam Chair, while we have the opportunity to get people working in the middle of this pandemic, when we have to get people back to work.

4:50

The other part of it as well on the agricultural file is that we put in place an \$800 million investment into irrigation in partnership with the irrigation districts as well as the Canada Infrastructure Bank – \$800 million – which is going to provide irrigation to over 200,000 acres, create thousands of jobs, as well as increase our GDP by over \$400 million. That's just one piece of this.

We're building on our foundational strengths – agriculture, forestry, energy – and finding lots of different ways to diversify our economy. The recovery plan is truly one of the largest diversification efforts, at least in my lifetime, and we're making sure that we get that done for Albertans so that they have jobs for tomorrow.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Minister, for that very comprehensive answer. In your answer you had touched on small businesses, and I couldn't agree more. Alberta's small businesses are so critical to our economy, and, as you're aware, they contribute more GDP per capita than small businesses anywhere else in the country, which I think is a really interesting and important fact. We saw that these businesses were drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of revenue that was associated with orders to close or curtail operations. We saw an increase of \$200 million for the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant, and I was just wondering if you can explain how this helped these businesses relaunch after the effects of this pandemic.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you for that question. When I first was asked to take on this new role three months ago, I went into my first department meeting, and when in government you kind of get to hear the terminology. They said, "Oh, yeah, our SMERG is doing

this, and SMERG is doing that," and I had to kind of stop them and ask them what a SMERG was. It sounded a little bit like *The Hobbit*; you're dealing with Smaug versus SMERG. Apparently, this is our relaunch grant. You have to kind of interpret, you know, government lingo and the mannerisms that they have.

With our relaunch grant, which is \$200 million for small businesses, we made sure that that was there for over 16,000 businesses that qualified to date with the first round. We've just put in place a second tranche of relaunch grant availability to businesses that have now been impacted by new health measures in the second wave of the pandemic. Small businesses can qualify for up to \$10,000 of payments. We've done that. We've also lowered the threshold. Your income has to be impacted. We lowered it from 50 per cent originally down to 40 per cent to make sure that we can cover off more small businesses that have been impacted by the pandemic. Again, as I mentioned earlier on, 16,000 businesses have qualified, that employ over 100,000 people here in the province of Alberta.

We're going to continue to be there to support our small businesses. As I've said before, we're in that fourth quarter of the pandemic, you know, where there's that light at the end of the tunnel. Hopefully, we're going to get there very soon. We're going to continue to be there to support our small businesses.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you so much, Minister. That's fantastic to hear. Small businesses do really play such an important role in our economy.

With that, I'd like to cede the rest of my time to the Member for Peace River.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to direct a couple of my questions to the Minister of Education. Now, when we returned to school this fall, it really was a testament to the hard work, diligence, and self-reliance of a good number of Alberta families and also the diligence and hard work of the educators and administrators in our public education system that worked tirelessly to make sure that it went smoothly in a very challenging and trying situation. Lots of things needed to happen in those places of education so that it went smoothly and was a safe relaunch.

Now, I'm interested to know if the minister can speak a bit to the accelerated capital maintenance and renewal fund that the minister introduced, particularly surrounding COVID-19 learning environments. What has happened there, how much money was committed, and what kinds of resources did that bring to schools in terms of a safe learning environment for these children?

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you so much for the question. Since I didn't have a chance to speak to this earlier, I'm really happy to speak to it. We committed \$250 million, that was dispersed across all school authorities, for accelerated capital infrastructure maintenance and renewal funding. This created thousands of jobs, jobs that were much needed in our economy at a critical time during this pandemic. What these resources, these dollars were used for by school divisions were for many enhancements to our current schools and school buildings, particularly hands-free sinks, automatic flush toilets, automatic doors. Many of these items are critical in helping reduce the spread of COVID, as we all know. Beyond that, many of the school authorities also chose to use portions of these funds to upgrade their ventilation systems, their HVAC systems. Again, something very critical in the pandemic fight.

You know, beyond this, the dollars were used to enhance the environments that the schools have. I know that all school

authorities reached out to me, the vast majority of them for sure, to thank us for this accelerated capital maintenance and renewal funding. They were able to put it to good use immediately, and, as I said, it created many much-needed jobs and improved our school buildings. So when our students were able to come back to in-person learning in September, those environments were ready for them, ready to accept them. It was critical funding needed at a critical time that we were able to put into play, and every school authority benefited from it.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the minister, critical funding at a critical time is exactly right. The situation that many of these educators were in was very, very stressful for them.

The truth is that the priority that the government has put, that you have repeated over and over again with every public messaging, on safety – safety for the children, safety for the educators, for administrators, everyone involved in education has been a priority. I know from speaking first-hand to educators and administrators, people in that field of work, in my constituency and in my family even that they do appreciate that priority that we have put on it and the balance that we have put on it, understanding that it is important that these kids receive the education. We continue to go forward. Keep calm and carry on.

The next question I'd like to ask will remain on this topic surrounding safe school environments and learning environments, particularly looking at the kind of funding that we have as the only province, the only government in Canada that has provided PPE at no cost to the schools. Now, I know that many of the educators I know personally benefited from that. Schools are very happy to have seen those sorts of supports. Can the minister speak about this program, whether or not it's been successful on a larger scale across the province, not just anecdotally within my constituency, and talk a bit about how it's affected the re-entry launch initially as well.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you for that question. Agreed. When we were looking at bringing our students back and when we, in discussions with the chief medical officer of health, had determined that students from grade 4 to grade 12 would require wearing of a mask, I felt it . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, that concludes that 10-minute block.

We are now to members of the Official Opposition. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I will just quickly start with a quick comment in response to a question around the WCB deferrals. We heard about cash flow issues but that those deferrals were for 2020 only. It's just a comment that cash flow issues are only getting worse right now.

Having said that, the minister was responding about in-year savings. If you can just pick up where you left off, keep it quick, and I'll move on.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. As I was saying, the savings are spread across the department, with approximately \$100,000 in ministry support

services and \$450,000 in both workforce strategies and safe, fair, and healthy workplaces. These savings will not have a direct impact on our programs and services being delivered to Albertans.

The other thing I will say is that I had the opportunity to dig into the information with respect to the WCB, and there was no contemplation to return the surpluses because, unfortunately, we don't anticipate a surplus this year.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My next question – perhaps the Minister of Finance might be best suited. I was looking through all of the federal government transfers, and one that I was hoping to see was the essential worker initiative announced by the federal government on May 7, but I was not able to find that information. So my questions to you would be: how much for that essential worker initiative was made available by the federal government, and how much has been transferred by the federal government so far under that initiative?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Chair. I can report that we used the full amount available to us as a province without strings attached. I believe that number was \$47 million. We will confirm that. My officials will confirm that. But we recognize that there was need in a number of categories, particularly in continuing care homes and for health care workers, so we responded with a program to top up wages.

5:00

Ms Gray: Thank you, Minister. I understand. Okay. So \$47 million, no strings attached, and you will confirm that.

Can you please let us know how much was on the table? I assume the strings attached would be matching provincial money.

Mr. Toews: There were additional monies that were available provided a province is matched, and, Madam Chair, we can provide that total to the members opposite. Again, we moved quickly at the time to meet an emerging need, particularly, specifically, in continuing care homes, or perhaps that's where the highest priority was. That's why we utilized that funding and ensured that continuing care health care workers were adequately compensated during a very difficult time of delivering service.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. On page 60 when we're talking about transfers out of the ministry of labour, there is a transfer to Agriculture and Forestry for the agriculture training program. My question is: how much of that was flow-through federal money?

Secondly, on Transportation, for the driving back to work grant program, I wasn't able, just with some quick googling, to find out more about that driving back to work grant program. I would love to hear more about it.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair. Labour and Immigration, as you know, works closely with partner ministries. These transfers total \$4 million. It's a result of responding to labour market needs in both agriculture and transportation industries: \$3 million to Ag and Forestry for the agriculture training support program, which helps employers in the food supply chain provide necessary training to new Alberta employees. The \$3 million is offset by federal revenue from the Canada-Alberta workforce development agreement. In

addition, another \$2 million in federal funding is being directed towards this program through the Canadian agriculture partnership. This job training support complements Alberta's Agriculture Job Connector, a web resource to help agriculture employers looking for workers to connect with job seekers.

With respect to Transportation \$1 million is for the driving back to work grant program. The purpose of this program is to address long-term labour market issues in the commercial trucking sector by supporting the cost of mandatory entry-level training, known as MELT, for unemployed Albertans.

I'll just note that in addition to the \$1 million from Labour and Immigration, Advanced Education and Community and Social Services are also transferring \$1 million each in support of this program. The \$3 million total is offset, again, by federal revenue from the Canada-Alberta labour market development agreement. Despite short-term unemployment in the commercial trucking sector resulting from the pandemic, it's estimated that by 2023 there could be a shortage of approximately 3,600 commercial drivers in Alberta, so we really need to stem this tide. This program will provide a new source of funding for unemployed Albertans to obtain the training they need to pursue careers as commercial carriers.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will cede the rest of my time to my colleague from Lethbridge-West.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you. I have a few questions, just to follow up on something that was discussed earlier. It sounded to me – I just want to confirm my understanding – that in the capital plan, then, we have \$8.2 billion that is in the forecast here for investment in various initiatives and then the \$10 billion that is referenced as part of the government recovery plan. That's the \$8 billion plus the \$1.5 billion of equity from the Keystone XL equity stake that the government is taking. Just to confirm my understanding, then, the \$1.5 billion is coming out of the capital plan, and that's where those funds are flowing from, not operating expense. The monthly disbursements that we heard about on Tuesday at Public Accounts, then, are flowing from the capital plan. I just want to confirm my understanding.

If I'm not correct, I invite the minister to make sure that I am corrected on this, that those monthly amounts are flowing out of the capital plan. My question, then, is: if that is the case and if I'm correct in what I've heard, where do we see those financial assets of the equity stake represented on the balance sheet? I'm looking at page 8 of the balance sheet summary, and I don't see it in equity and commercial enterprises, or at least it doesn't really make sense for it to be there because it's \$1.2 billion this year and then forecast at \$500 million next year. So that doesn't really add up if it's \$1.5 billion worth of equity.

I'm wondering where I find that \$1.5 billion stake in equity. Is it all booked in this capital plan? How is it represented as a financial asset? How is it given its accounting treatment with respect to depreciation or any of those things? When is it expected to come off that balance sheet as well? Are we seeing those monthly amounts right now coming out of the capital plan, Minister?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The Keystone XL investment is not coming out of the capital plan. It is an investment

that is being made by the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission. Again, it's not being funded from the capital plan.

Ms Phillips: Can the minister, then, explain to the House within the expense how that asset is being treated by the APMC, what the structure is for them, what those monthly amounts are, and if the government of Alberta then transferred that whole \$1.5 billion to the APMC? What is the amount that was referred to as monthly on Tuesday? Is it coming out of APMC or the GOA or some combination?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: All right. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The investment in KXL will be on the books of APMC. Monthly amounts are not flowing from the government of Alberta. Monthly the APMC is making those payments as construction progresses on Keystone XL.

In terms of an expenditure it isn't an expenditure. Again, Madam Chair, it's an investment that will appear on the balance sheet of APMC, offset by debt. Again, it isn't an expenditure, either operating or capital, directly to the government of Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Thank you. I have a couple of questions about – actually, I have a really quick one about cash on hand. I do recall being involved in some discussions around increasing our cash on hand, which we did do in, I guess, '18-19, and then there was a reduction in that cash on hand and . . . [Ms Phillips' speaking time expired] We'll get to it.

The Chair: Any government caucus members for the next 10-minute block? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll continue where I left off, on the theme of education, this time departing slightly from some of the concerns around COVID to one that is a concern within my own constituency surrounding the bilateral agreement that Alberta has with the federal government surrounding helping to provide education for minority French language Albertans. It's something important to me because le Conseil Scolaire du Nord-Ouest does operate a number of schools in my constituency. I'm very proud of the work that they do. I'm very proud of the fact that the minister has taken a lot of time out of her agenda to make education in my constituency, particularly francophone education, a priority. My question is: could you update us with some of the details of that bilateral agreement, how it's going, and how it provides education, particularly for my constituents but all Albertans, surrounding French language education?

Member LaGrange: Absolutely. Happy to do that. You're absolutely right. We do sign a bilateral agreement with the federal government to recognize and support the very important contributions that the francophone community does make to Alberta. Really, what we want to do is strengthen francophone education within the province of Alberta, so we utilize those dollars in that respect. Under the official languages and education program we ratified the protocol agreements with the federal government for minority language education and second-language education.

5:10

The protocol will be in effect until the '22-23 school year. Under the protocol Alberta will receive about \$15.8 million annually for four years, including new minority language funding of about \$1.6 million. The funding is shared between Education and Advanced

Education. Our portion, for Education, is about 77 per cent of the overall funding that I just mentioned, or about \$12.1 million annually. As part of our bilateral agreement the federal government also contributes funds for school-building projects for francophone school authorities. For this particular year, for the 2020-2021 school year, we have three schools that have been approved under this agreement, for a total of \$2.36 million of federal funding.

While we appreciate the federal funding, we always are advocating for more. We work very closely with our francophone community and realize that more can be done, and we continue to advocate to our federal government to ensure that they provide more funding if possible.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Williams: Merci, Madame la ministre, pour la réponse. I thank you very much for the answer, and so do the francophone students across the province of Alberta.

I'd like to take the remainder of my time and cede that time to the Member for Calgary-Peigan.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Peigan.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to ask some questions of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and congratulate her on her three-month anniversary today on her new appointment and commend her on what a tremendous job she's doing.

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the municipal stimulus program, and can you tell us a little bit about who is eligible for this funding?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Allard: I'm happy to. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. The municipal stimulus program is a program that we designed in response to the pandemic to assist municipalities and, obviously, Albertans to get back to work. This program is \$500 million allocated across the province to municipalities based on a formula largely predicated on their per capita population. The municipal stimulus program will provide funding for shovel-ready projects and shovel-worthy projects. We asked municipalities to determine which projects would be the most advantageous not only for today but for future generations to have critical infrastructure that they could leverage against any debt that we're incurring in this unprecedented time.

I thank the member for the question.

Ms Fir: Thank you very much to the minister for her answer. I was also wondering if she could talk a little bit about the safe restart program. Specifically, what is the safe restart program, and do all municipalities receive this funding?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. The safe restart program, or MOST, as we're calling it, the municipal operating support transfer, consists of \$606.5 million. It's a partnership with the federal government: \$303.2 million was given by the province in matching funds to the federal government's funding. This operational spending budget combined with the municipal stimulus program funding amounts to over \$1.1 billion in transfers to municipalities at this critical time in our history. This will allow municipalities the flexibility to allocate funding where they need to in order to maintain critical services to citizens and also, again, to invest in infrastructure.

The funding that the member is asking about specifically is with respect to operational spend, but we have applied a great deal of latitude to municipalities to allow them to transfer that funding where necessary. A portion of that funding, \$30 million, was allocated specifically to Canmore, Banff, and Jasper to assist with tourism initiatives in those cities, and another \$140 million of that bucket of funding was allocated to municipalities that had public transit and were experiencing incredible shortfalls in their revenues for their public transit systems.

Again I thank the member for the question.

Ms Fir: Thank you very much to the minister. Also, I wanted to inquire: why have you requested over \$200 million for DRP funding, and do these totals reflect the Treasury Board's disaster contingency funds?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair and again to the member for the question. Wildfire response was less costly this year, which was one of the good-news stories of the year, but there were still disasters to respond to. The disaster recovery costs that we incurred cover widespread flood events that took place in the spring. The communities that were affected include the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, Mackenzie county, the city of Calgary, east-central Alberta communities, and the village of Acme for a total of 157.1 million. In addition, the cost of responding to the pandemic totalled over \$51 million, including the cost of sustaining the Provincial Operations Centre at enhanced levels over a sustained period of time. I believe we were at level 4 for over two months.

I thank the member for the question.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Fir: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to cede the remainder of my time to the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

The Chair: The hon. member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll try to snap this thing off here as well. I'd like to talk, if I can, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation Really, Minister, it seems like you've kind of got the lion's share here with what's going on with the economic relaunch. Between our economic recovery plan being protecting, creating, building, and diversifying, you seem to have a large part of that.

Many Alberta businesses were facing challenges paying the rent during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we'll feel the economic pressures even as their businesses reopen. Businesses suffered, and a lot of folks had problems making the rent payments, et cetera. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation explain how our government was able to help out some of these small businesses with the rent assistance?

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you to the member for the question. We worked with the federal government. It wasn't a perfect system that we had when it came to rent supports and commercial supports that were there. We allocated \$67 million for our budget. So far we've allocated about \$64 million of rent supports to small-business owners here that needed that assistance; 14,608 businesses, I believe, have taken advantage of that program and used it as required to get through this pandemic.

That wasn't it, though. We also provided the relaunch grant to small businesses that qualified that had revenue drops. I mentioned earlier on that we had the first tranche for the relaunch grant as we

came out of the first wave. Now we have a second tranche of the relaunch grant, so the aggregate amount there could be up to \$10,000 for a small business that's had significant revenue declines throughout the pandemic.

We've also had numerous deferrals. Working with the Minister of Finance and other departments, we made numerous deferrals as well, with hundreds of millions of dollars in supports for small businesses here to make sure that they can get through this pandemic. I mentioned as well that while there's a light at the end of the tunnel, we still have a little ways to go here. We're doing everything we can to help those small businesses that employ hundreds of thousands of Albertans.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Minister. I don't think any of us realized how bad it was going to be when we first ran. I was telling folks that, you know, we didn't know how broke we were until we got here, and now the economic needle is somewhere between Great Depression and major recession.

But one of the things that I have seen in my area is that innovation. There are some really good small businesses that are just needing a little bit of a leverage and a kick-start or a leg-up. Alberta Innovates provides a range of these programs, I believe, for entrepreneurs through the funding, coaching, expertise, and research. I noticed that you had \$25 million allocated. Can you expound on that a little bit and tell us what that's up to in Alberta Innovates and how that supports future growth?

Mr. Schweitzer: Just to provide some context as well, in working with the minister of environment and the many other ministries, the Alberta Innovates . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, we are now in opposition block time. I see the hon. member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm actually going to switch over and leave that other question aside because I have some other questions about our investment income. I'm seeing here that in terms of our revenues we have some adjustments from budget in terms of our investment income from the heritage fund that have been adjusted downward \$325 million. Then in the forecast as well the sort of rolled-up line of investment income for next year and the year after drops by \$927 million and \$820 million, respectively, which is considerably more.

5:20

I have a few questions about the heritage fund and reporting and some of the reductions downward. The first piece that I am interested in is: will the government return to disclosing the heritage fund's asset allocation and returns? That piece was stripped out of the Q1 report from the heritage fund, and the reasoning given at the time was that they didn't want to alarm Albertans. You know, I think that we can all agree that if any of our investment managers didn't send us a monthly report of our asset allocation and our returns or if BlackRock just didn't send me the information from an ETF that I hold with my asset allocation and returns, I'd be – well, I don't think that BlackRock if they undertook such business practices would have \$7 trillion in assets under management. That's a fairly nonstandard approach to talking to Albertans about returns from any of their investments.

I'm wondering if that information will be returning to being disclosed to Albertans, because now we are seeing a \$325 million reduction from budget in the heritage fund returns to the treasury. My question there is: how much of that reduction is from the fallout of the volatility trading adjustments? Does it contain all of those? There were many of those transactions at the time when we first

received information about this, over the spring and in September, that a lot of those transactions hadn't been concluded.

Does that \$325 million represent the full conclusion of the VOLTS strategy? Is any of the investment income in the subsequent lines that are underneath the reductions of expected income off budget of \$927 million and \$820 million, respectively, in the next two years attributable to the fallout from the VOLTS strategy? And are there any other reasons beyond usual market expectations that the government is looking at that went into the calculation for the reductions of the \$360 million in the other income – I don't have it in front of me – the \$325 million out of the heritage fund this year, and then the expected reductions in investment income over the next two subsequent years? I'm looking for some information on that, and I'm looking for a commitment that asset allocation and returns as a normal run of course of disclosure will return to the Department of Finance's disclosure to Albertans around what is happening to their heritage fund.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: All right. Good. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. What I can say with respect to the heritage trust fund report is that there was a reporting format change. That's really all that was intended. I will take the member's question and, I think, implied preference into consideration as we consider future report formats. One thing I can assure members of this House is that we will ensure that reporting going forward will be transparent to Albertans with respect to the investments that we hold in the heritage trust fund, because all Albertans are interested in the returns of that heritage trust fund because it's owned by all Albertans.

With respect to the losses incurred due to the VOLTS strategy the vast majority of those losses were reported in the year ended March 31, 2020. There is very little, if any, to be reported in the subsequent years, including the current fiscal year that we're in today. What I can say is that, again, relative to our projections around investment income for this current year and our out-years in our fiscal plan, we are dealing – we're living in a world right now of great economic uncertainty, so it is very difficult to make investment projects for the year that we are in today and for future years. We have used our best assumptions on where the global economy will be to project investment income, recognizing that certainly within the heritage fund asset mix there are illiquid assets that have provided great returns historically. Again, given the fact that we are in such a massive global economic contraction, we want to be conservative in our projections of investment income in the current year and going forward.

I will close with this. I can't understate the fact that we are in a time of great economic uncertainty. Investment income will be a revenue line that will be very hard to predict. We will continue in every fiscal update to be as transparent with Albertans as possible.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I think I can assure the minister that it's more than a preference of most investors who are having their assets managed that they be told on a pretty regular basis of the asset allocation and returns. In fact, I would be shocked if it wasn't a legal requirement, so that piece is, I think, on the part of Albertans, more than a preference. It's a basic approach to managing investments. There is a duty of care that is owed to Albertans. It's quite astonishing that that information wasn't there, so I'm glad to hear that it is going to return.

I have a couple of other questions about the investment income all told and rolled up into the out-years a \$927 million reduction and \$820 million reduction. Are any of those reductions as a result

of an expected investment review and a change in investment approach for the heritage fund? That was announced by a public servant at the last heritage fund meeting in a way that was quite a surprise, I think. Normally, the first major review of the heritage fund in over a decade – or I think it was just under a decade, actually, since 2011. Normally, that would be a matter of a government announcement and not someone who's there to answer questions. Can the minister unpack a little bit what's in that expected drop in income from investments – it's almost \$2 billion over the next couple of years – and why that's there?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, with respect to investment income projections I will just reiterate that we right now find ourselves in a world of global economic uncertainty. Consequently, predicting investment income is challenging, is difficult. We have done our best with the information that we have today, but we have, I think, responsibly taken a relatively conservative view. Again, at every fiscal update as there is more clarity and certainty, provided we're emerging from the pandemic – and we will emerge – we will be providing an update on that anticipated investment income.

With respect to the investment policy review for the heritage fund . . .

The Chair: We are now to government caucus members for the next 10-minute portion. The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Back again to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. Another \$25 million question for you. We kind of got cut off a little bit earlier there last time. Again, Alberta Innovates, coming back to those entrepreneurs, giving them access, coaching, expertise. You noted in the budget that there's \$25 million allocated. Can you tell us what exactly that's for, Minister?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thanks so much for the question on this. Alberta Innovates does a whole range of different projects that they provide research funding to. They work in collaboration with Emissions Reduction Alberta and the TIER program in allocating research from clean emissions to innovative technology companies that are being set up in this province. Alberta Innovates is kind of there. They touch on everything from the ecosystem, from agricultural technology to green technology to fintech. They're there to help a whole range of innovative processes we have here across the province. They work with our postsecondary institutions as well on research funding, working with us on that side, so there's a whole range of things that Alberta Innovates does. This is actually quite encouraging, just to kind of see where we are, and I'll highlight a little bit of my own hometown of Calgary. I know you're not from Calgary, but I'll highlight a little bit from my own hometown of Calgary that . . .

An Hon. Member: God's country.

Mr. Schweitzer: God's country he's just saying over here.

When you take a look at the 100 emerging cities in the world in technology, Calgary's actually ranked number 52 right now. It's on an upward trajectory. [interjection] We got Sundre chiming in, too, right now. Suddenly everybody wants to be God's country. We gotta calm them down a little bit.

Calgary's on an upward trajectory right now, and it actually ranks ahead of Ottawa. A lot of people think of Ottawa as a potential kind of emerging hub for technology. Calgary is on an upward trajectory. It broke its record for venture capital in 2019, broke its record again in 2020. You've got a bunch of unicorn companies now that are on the verge of becoming unicorns. It's just an exciting time to see how the innovation ecosystem is coming along in the province of Alberta.

5:30

Now, I know you're closer to Edmonton, so I'm going to highlight a couple of Edmonton companies as well. We actually had the University of Alberta recently. One of the professors there received a Nobel prize for the innovation in virology. There's a huge opportunity there with some of the potential for commercialization in the pharma, life sciences space. We also have – you know, Google DeepMind is here in Edmonton. They've got one of the top artificial intelligence, machine learning institutions here in Edmonton. It's quite encouraging to see this innovation ecosystem develop in our province.

But, really, some of this is also a bit of a shift in mindset. Alberta has always been an innovative province. Like, we unlocked the oil sands. We unlocked SAGD. We unlocked carbon capture. We're at the forefront of innovation. It's in our culture. It's in our blood, and now we're just looking at different places to apply it.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Thank you for that, Minister. You know, you did mention that I'm close to Edmonton. Well, actually, I would mention that Edmonton is close to us in God's country, which is actually Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

You know, some of the things we have going out there are pretty interesting. When you're talking about innovation, we have aerospace, we have the Villeneuve Landing Network, and we have the whole Acheson industrial park. We've got tons of innovators. And what I've been seeing in my travels, Minister, is that there's a lot of red tape. We've always been diverse, like you're saying. Some of these tech companies, talking about BioWare, for example, and then Pegasus Imagery: we're starting to see some synergy. They're looking for some red tape reduction. They're looking for some start-up capital and also trying to connect the dots.

With that, you've got Alberta Enterprise. It helps support those tech entrepreneurs getting access to capital. Again, you've allocated another \$25 million. Could you let us know a little bit about that, please?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: I appreciate it. I'm going to try and keep my answer a little bit shorter so we can get more questions in. The Alberta Enterprise Corporation is a fund-on-fund structure. We've put in place \$175 million for them over three years to make sure that we leverage private-sector dollars. It should create about a half billion dollars of investment into venture capital here in Alberta. Encouraging times. Also, I know the member is a big fan of the drone opportunity here in Alberta. I didn't fully appreciate the applications for it. We do have the ability to do that here, particularly in the capital region. Lots of commercial applications on that front as well.

Mr. Getson: Awesome.

I'd like to cede my time to the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, my second-favourite part of the country, again, representing that cowboy country down there. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Hon. members, just be careful with disparaging remarks about constituencies.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair. Cowboy country is not disparaging, though. I'm just clarifying.

Yeah. Pleasure to rise, take part in supplementary estimates. I wouldn't mind asking a few questions of the Minister of Environment and Parks. I know he's always eager to explain and clarify for this House the great work that's being done by the TIER fund, the emissions that are being reduced, the great technologies that are being leveraged. We know it's important for this government to support and enhance the ability of Alberta's communities to adapt to changing trends and address future scenarios resulting from a changing climate. This must be done while simultaneously supporting the province's economic recovery. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks explain the new funding for emissions management and the various ways it can help support Albertans while achieving these broader goals?

The Chair: The minister of God's country.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, there you go. There's somebody who's been to David Thompson country right there, Madam Chair, through you to my fellow colleagues.

Mr. Williams: Are you calling David Thompson God?

Mr. Jason Nixon: I did not go quite that far. But I did say that his country was God's country, for sure, Madam Chair, to the member from the Peace Country.

I do appreciate the question from the Member for Drumheller-Stettler when it comes to the technology innovation and emissions program and the investment that was inside supplementary supply, that is before the Chamber today. We have made a significant investment of about three-quarters of a billion dollars in total. Not all of that is inside supplementary supply. Some of it is taking place elsewhere within the budget. But it has been matched with contributions from the industry that take it to \$1.9 billion, Madam Chair, and it's created just over 9,000 jobs inside our province, or it will when we have finished implementing it.

I know the hon. member is very excited about some of the programs that are taking place in regard to methane. I think he shares the excitement in those programs for the same reasons that I do. It's because it puts to work many constituents inside his constituency and my constituency and has the exciting aspect of also putting together manufacturers that are both in his constituency and mine and in several constituencies of other members of this place where they actually manufacture the products around being able to reduce methane emissions. I think that in Sundre, in my community, is a great organization called Black Gold Technologies, who's developed some of the best methane reduction technologies for the oil and gas industry, that are used all across the world.

The exciting thing about being able to use TIER, which we are doing already underneath our environmental obligations and our agreements both with the federal government and internationally, at the same time on the stimulus side of things, Madam Chair, is that we can go and create programs that will have Black Gold be able to increase the technology that they have to install on well sites all across the province. The people that do that are the very same oil and gas workers that normally work on our oil and gas sites all across the province. Like the orphan well program or the well reclamation program, that has been put together by the hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Energy minister, it accomplishes some of the same things, being able to put together the very same

contractors that work each and every day inside the oil and gas industry.

The most exciting thing is that it actually reduces GHG emissions. It will reduce, just that program alone that has come through in the stimulus package, GHG emissions by 40 megatonnes by 2030 and 45 megatonnes by 2050, a significant contrast to the former government, who brought forward, of course, as you know, Madam Chair, a carbon tax inside our province. Their own leader could not even articulate one megatonne of reduction after putting an entire carbon tax on the economy. We're excited by that.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler for all his hard work advocating for many of his constituents that are helping create technology and innovation all across the province. I think he's got one more question before me, so I'm going to yield the floor to him.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister. A lot of great work has been done lately in regard to the importance of watersheds, making sure they're resilient, rehabilitating them. Can the minister explain, with the monies in the supplementary estimates, how that's being done to work with the communities and industries to protect our watersheds?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah. Time is tight, Madam Chair, so I'll be very, very quick with that. This is also an important program that we brought forward, very similar to TIER, where we're able to use environmental money that we already have within funds, put it to work right now to be able to put people back to work but deal with certain environmental obligations. The most exciting part about that program is that it's a sharp contrast to the former government, who did not trust local volunteer organizations to be able to help us do work when it comes to water restoration or protection of our waterways. That money immediately went into working with nonprofit societies all across the province to help us be able to protect waterway crossings at different spots like that, staying with our commitment to trust Albertans to be able to manage their backyard, unlike the NDP, who spent most of their time in government trying to shut Albertans' backyard.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the minister.

I'll cede the rest of my time to the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

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

Mr. Turton: Awesome. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise here today for supplementary supply estimates. You know, my riding has the advantage of being surrounded by God's country, so I will say that I have some of the most beautiful landscapes around my riding. We have a majestic industrial park as well and used car dealerships, but it is on a slightly different level as God's country surrounding it. But it is a pleasure to be here today.

You know, one of the advantages of being surrounded, next to God's country is that many of the individuals and families in the two ridings that surround Spruce Grove and Stony Plain come to Spruce Grove and Stony Plain to shop, to work . . .

The Chair: My apologies, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the remaining seven minutes.

Ms Gray: Thank you. Very quickly in the seven minutes I want to say thank you to the Minister of Finance, who's already committed to sharing some more information around that essential worker initiative, but just to make sure, I'm asking all the questions I have. Would the minister be willing to provide a breakdown of where and how that \$47 million has been distributed? Who has received that?

Secondly, you talked about using the money that had no strings attached. Can you clarify that strings attached to that matching – was that at a 1-to-1 basis? Some provinces have reported 3 to 1, where the feds would be the three and the province the one.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I can confirm that the sharing, the fed-prov sharing, of that funding was 75-25, as the member opposite has noted in other provinces. I will commit to the member opposite that we will provide the information in terms of the details of where the funds that we did receive were advanced and to which department.

Ms Gray: Much appreciated.

I will cede the final five minutes to my colleague.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.
5:40

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll begin with questions to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. In item 2.4 the government indicates that it'll transfer \$25 million to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. In its recovery plan the government promised an additional \$175 million to AEC, which was a very welcome step after the original open hostility to the tech sector by the government upon coming into power. Now, having said that, to the minister. At the moment we see that there's been a \$25 million investment. My question is: will that continue to be an incremental investment over years, or what is the time frame around the \$175 million commitment?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I mean, this is something, a word that may come up every now and again. You may hear somebody on our side use the term "socialist" every now and again to maybe describe somebody on the other side. But I've heard that on the other side they may even describe that member as the capitalist amongst the socialists over there. I don't know if that's a better burn than anything else. I don't know if that's helpful. He may want to clip this for social media. I've heard that he may be the capitalist on the other side.

When it comes to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, this is an accounting exercise where, because it is an investment vehicle, the full \$175 million will be made available over three years as they find the applicable ventures to deploy it into. That funding is available to them. We've given Alberta Enterprise Corporation the certainty that it requires to be able to have that investment going forward. As they line up the venture capital, those funds will be deployed.

Mr. Bilous: Just to clarify – thank you, Minister – what that means is that AEC can go out knowing they have the additional \$175 million even if they don't have it today. I appreciate and have experience working with them, knowing that setting up funds takes

time. But they can commit that dollar amount even if they don't have it in their bank account today.

Mr. Schweitzer: I can confirm that the full \$175 million over three years is available to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation.

Mr. Bilous: Great. Still with AEC but now talking a little bit about the accelerate fund III, the government invested an additional \$5 million into the fund. Of course, the accelerate fund III is investing exclusively in Alberta companies. Is the government planning to increase that fund at all, or is any of the \$175 million going into the accelerate fund III, or is that a decision left up to AEC exclusively? If the minister can comment if there is a plan to increase funding for that fund.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you so much. Again, the discretion for how to allocate is left to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. This was their first investment amongst this new tranche of funds to go out. The decision as to further resources or further allocations would be left to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation.

Mr. Bilous: Great. I will, you know, thank the minister for that commitment as, again, funding to the AEC has benefited Alberta as far as attracting investment, as far as putting us on the map. It's welcome news to the community.

I will remind the minister that the community also has asked for – and what stacked very nicely with funding to AEC was, of course, an investor tax credit, which the minister will know, talking to industry, helped really compound the effect of the increased investment to the AEC. That was more of a question than a comment, Madam Chair.

In my final moments here that I believe I have, I just want to talk really quickly about funding. The federal government committed targeted support to the innovation ecosystem through the National Research Council and WED, or Western Economic Diversification. They paid off in sustaining the sector and launching new technologies, which, of course, helped us during this pandemic. The minister knows that the tech sector is looking for additional supports. In addition to essentially SRED, that was reinstated, the one program, you know, are there further plans within the existing budget for supports to really catapult our technology space?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you. I think we're almost out of time here, but we can always have a discussion offline if I don't get it fully answered. We are working with the federal government to try and leverage every single dollar. Alberta Innovates always tries to get matching funds from the federal government. I also had a meeting recently with the digital supercluster . . .

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2020-21 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 48, agreed to on November 24, 2020, the allotted time of three hours has now elapsed, so I must now put the following question.

Those members in favour of the resolutions for the 2020-21 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Any opposed, please say no. Carried.
Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.
I would now like to invite the hon. Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2020-21 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I so move.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

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

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2020-21 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, have been approved.

Advanced Education: expense, \$65,389,000.
Agriculture and Forestry: expense, \$72,608,000; financial transactions, \$500,000.
Children's Services: expense, \$53,781,000.
Community and Social Services: expense, \$118,492,000.
Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women: expense, \$3,215,000.
Education: expense, \$469,826,000.
Energy: expense, \$513,594,000; financial transactions, \$104,000,000.
Environment and Parks: expense, \$302,984,000.
Health: expense, \$1,303,227,000.
Indigenous Relations: financial transactions, \$500,000.
Jobs, Economy and Innovation: expense, \$282,500,000; financial transactions, \$25,000,000.
Justice and Solicitor General: capital investment, \$10,835,000.
Labour and Immigration: expense, \$325,943,000.
Municipal Affairs: expense, \$1,289,685,000; financial transactions, \$76,800,000.
Seniors and Housing: expense, \$31,100,000.
Transportation: expense, \$133,764,000; capital investment, \$468,383,000.
Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$2,436,000.
The Committee of Supply has also approved the following amounts to be transferred.
Transfer from Advanced Education: expense vote to Transportation expense vote, \$1,000,000.
Transfer from Labour and Immigration: expense vote to Agriculture and Forestry expense vote, \$3,000,000.
Transfer from Community and Social Services expense vote to Transportation expense vote, \$1,000,000.

Transfer from Labour and Immigration expense vote to Transportation expense vote, \$1,000,000.

Transfer from Indigenous Relations financial transactions vote to Seniors and Housing financial transactions vote, \$1,389,000.

The Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 61(3) following the Committee of Supply's report on the supplementary supply estimates, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the Appropriation Act.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 50

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2020

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 50, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2020. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

5:50

The bill requests a total of \$5.7 billion from the general revenue fund, mainly for the COVID-19 response and Alberta's recovery plan. I ask all my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to support this bill to help the province fight the pandemic and mitigate its economic impacts.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the Assembly to 7:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Sorry. You're more than welcome to move adjournment after we vote on first reading, and then I can call upon you again, and you can move adjournment at that time if you're fine with that . . .

Mr. Toews: I'm good.

The Speaker: . . . and we're fine with that.

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move adjournment of the Assembly until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:51 p.m.]

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