



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 30, 2020

Day 73

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)  
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
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Government Whip  
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)  
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)  
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Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UCP)  
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Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)  
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UCP)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)  
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Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)  
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
Grant Hunter	Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Jason Luan	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Kaycee Madu	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Ric McIver	Minister of Transportation
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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

Eggen  
Glasgo  
Gray  
Jones  
Phillips  
Singh  
Turton

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

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Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

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Barnes  
Bilous  
Dang  
Horner  
Irwin  
Reid  
Rosin  
Stephan  
Toor

### **Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee**

Chair: Mr. Schow  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Horner

Ceci  
Dang  
Fir  
Goodridge  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Rutherford  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Smith  
Sweet

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Goodridge  
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery  
Carson  
Glasgo  
Guthrie  
Neudorf  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Rutherford  
Sabir  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Schow  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Sigurdson

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Lovely  
Loyola  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Rutherford  
Shepherd  
Sweet  
van Dijken  
Walker

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Ellis

Dang  
Deol  
Goehring  
Goodridge  
Long  
Neudorf  
Sabir  
Walker  
Williams

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

Chair: Mr. Ellis  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Ganley  
Glasgo  
Horner  
Irwin  
Neudorf  
Nielsen  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Sigurdson, L.  
Sigurdson, R.J.

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Deol  
Issik  
Jones  
Lovely  
Loyola  
Pancholi  
Rehn  
Reid  
Renaud  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Ms Phillips  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Gotfried

Barnes  
Dach  
Guthrie  
Reid  
Renaud  
Rosin  
Rowswell  
Schmidt  
Stephan  
Toor

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Hanson  
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach  
Feehan  
Fir  
Ganley  
Getson  
Loewen  
Rehn  
Singh  
Smith  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 30, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to her government and to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing. In accordance with the COVID-19 public health guidelines, please refrain from joining in the singing of our national anthem. We will be led by recording artist Brooklyn Elhard.

**Ms Elhard:**

O Canada, our home and native land!  
True patriot love in all of us command.  
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,  
The True North strong and free!  
From far and wide, O Canada,  
We stand on guard for thee.  
God keep our land glorious and free!  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, please be seated.

### Members' Statements

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

#### Airlines

**Mr. Gotfried:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our airline sector has been decimated by COVID-19's devastating impact on domestic and international travel. Our aviation sector has thus been left to fend for itself during a time when passenger movements are down by as much as 90 per cent. Federal Transport Minister Garneau said on November 8 that "the Government of Canada is developing a package of assistance to Canadian airlines, airports and the aerospace sector." Twenty-two days later we are anxiously awaiting details. As early as May 29 the minister noted: we are monitoring the situation from day to day; I have a responsibility to make sure that when this pandemic is over, we still have an airline industry. That is now 185 days of monitoring yet no action to date.

Let's remember that our airlines repatriated over 10,000 stranded Canadians during the height of the pandemic. Let's also not forget that our airlines bring essential goods and vital medical supplies to Canada, delivering them across our country, including to remote northern communities. When industry experts describe the current situation as having the impact of 9/11 and the 2008 economic crisis combined, they severely understate the depths of this once-in-a-lifetime challenge to the affordable mobility we all too often take for granted.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government understands this, which is why we've rolled up our sleeves to work with the aviation industry and other facets of our deeply impacted visitor economy to ensure they're cleared for takeoff now and into the future. From collaboration and leadership on the international border testing pilot

program, newly instituted preflight protocols, and the impending establishment of the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council, this government knows what effective partnerships look like and will continue to do all possible to protect a sector so vital to our economy, our livelihoods, and our global aspirations.

Mr. Speaker, enough talk from our federal counterparts. Now is the time and maybe today is the day to speak up and let our aviation industry know that we appreciate their vital role in the new economy in a much-longed-for return to the Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

### Essential Service Provider Wage Supplements

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, this government has betrayed Alberta workers. Front-line workers have put their lives at risk in a Herculean task to keep Albertans safe. Day after day we have heard the stories of lives saved by our health care heroes. When we're through this pandemic, we know that we owe these heroes a debt we cannot possibly repay, and this UCP government have made it clear they're not even going to try. This government has fought with health care workers from day one: attacking doctors, planning to fire nurses, telling workers critical to our hospitals that they don't count as front line, and even describing these workers as a drain on the economy.

While other provinces have worked with the federal government to provide wage top-ups to essential workers, the UCP is fixated on fighting with the federal government and so far has left hundreds of millions of dollars on the table, hundreds of millions of dollars left behind because this Finance minister would rather let the money sit in Ottawa than see it in the pockets of hard-working Albertans.

It's appalling that this Premier would let his political disagreements with the Prime Minister stop him from giving our pandemic heroes the resources they deserve. This is money that, if delivered to Alberta workers, would be used in our provincial economy. This is money that, if given to the workers, would be used to support local business. This is money that our front-line heroes have earned with blood, sweat, and tears.

Albertans see the actions of the UCP as what they are: selfish, thoughtless, and cruel. Unlike the UCP, this side of the House sincerely thanks front-line workers for all they've done during this pandemic, and my message to the UCP is very simple. Smarten up. Give your head a shake. Stop attacking workers, and show them the respect they deserve. Get this money out of Ottawa and into the hands of workers. Albertans are watching.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

### Adoption

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and recognize Adoption Awareness Month. In November we celebrate the many individuals who have opened their hearts to give a child or in some cases children a loving and stable home. Alberta's government works hard to ensure children and youth in Alberta are safe, loved, and supported, and our adoptive families are valued partners in this very important work.

As many of you know, my wife and I journeyed through the adoption process and brought home our son Xavier as a baby many years ago. When I say that it was a journey, I mean it. Adopting our son took upwards of three years and an astonishingly large amount of paperwork and red tape, which took an emotional toll on my family, and although, looking back, I wouldn't change any of it, for Xavier completed our family, I know our story isn't unique.

Prospective adoptive parents from all over the province experience the same seemingly endless waiting and never-ending stack of paperwork, and I also know that this experience isn't isolated to parents. Children can experience the same anxiety and stress, which is sad, because these are children who just want to find their forever family and forever home.

That is why I was especially glad to see Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020, be introduced into the House just last week. If passed, amendments will make the adoption process quicker and easier for parents and children, ultimately creating families and lifelong connections. Every person deserves a family, and every child deserves a home, and when a match is made between prospective adoptive parents and a child, a new family is created.

As we celebrate Adoption Awareness Month, I hope that you will help me in raising awareness and support for adoption and help me in supporting those who have already been adopted or who have been waiting to be adopted and in supporting those who still might be waiting.

Thank you.

### Government Priorities

**Member Irwin:** Today I'd like to tell you a story. It's the story of a government with all the wrong priorities, and it's the story of a province headed in the wrong direction fast, all because the UCP keeps prioritizing billionaires over the rest of us. Unlike the UCP, I'll show my work and provide you the evidence that demonstrates that this Premier cares more about his wealthy friends than you and your neighbours.

Chapter 1: one of the first things this Premier prioritized was a \$4.7 billion handout to large corporations. Why, you ask? Well, we'll never truly understand, but he explained that this money would somehow trickle down and help the average Albertan. The truth: not only did it not trickle down; it packed its bags, hopped on the first flight out of Alberta, and took the promised jobs along with it.

Now, on to chapter 2, a troubling one. The UCP claims they're facing dire fiscal challenges, yet when given money by the federal government to help essential workers, they declined it. Now, I can't help but wonder why they would do that. Had that money been for something else, would they have already snapped it up, say for their wealthy friends or to help them meet their party's fundraising targets? One can only speculate, but again this government's priorities couldn't be more wrong.

1:40

Finally, chapter 3. This is a government that has just decided that now is the time to focus even greater effort on their ridiculous war room in the midst of a pandemic. That's millions and millions of dollars that could be invested in teachers, EAs, nurses, doctors, contact tracers, supporting front-line workers. Instead, it's being frittered away on poorly written tweets and meaningless memes.

I must inform you that this is a condensed version of a much longer story, a story that shouldn't have to be told, but here we are. I could share with you for hours countless examples of this government showing that when it comes to priorities, supporting Albertans isn't one of them. Governing is about choices. The Premier has chosen his priority, and it's clearly not us. But on our side of the House we know our priority. Our priority is you, and with your help we'll be able to tell a much better story in 2023.

### Economic Relaunch and Personal Care Services

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Mr. Speaker, on November 24 the Premier addressed Albertans on the COVID-19 update. I was proud

and relieved to see that the Premier added measures that did not shut down local businesses but at the same time keep Albertans safe. He has provided guidance that will keep our economy going during the current health pandemic. Our province needs sensible policies around the COVID pandemic. We need to ensure that we save lives as well as livelihoods. There needs to be a balanced approach, and I believe that Albertans are more than capable of following the health guidelines set out by Dr. Hinshaw and her team while keeping their small businesses open.

An industry near and dear to my heart has been successful in their efforts to keep Albertans safe while continuing their operations. These are the personal care services, professionals such as hair salons, aestheticians, and massage therapists. During the first months of the pandemic Alberta's government decided to restrict nonessential businesses. Although deemed to be nonessential, these businesses are still small businesses that need to provide their services in person.

At the announcement on November 24 the Premier said, quote: some of you may recall all of the anxiety about reopening personal services in the spring, including hair salons; well, we don't know of a single known case of transmission in a hair salon. End quote. I would like to thank personal care professionals all over the province for their effort and due diligence in keeping their clients safe. Small-business owners that are able to keep their businesses open safely deserve respect and consideration when talking about restrictions. Having small businesses open such as hair salons, restaurants, and retail stores not only keeps our economy running but also provides much-needed services to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, now more than ever small businesses need our support. I thank the Premier for having a sensible approach to the pandemic and ask that Albertans support their local small businesses.

### Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

**Mr. Carson:** Two weeks ago our NDP caucus released a seven-point plan to support small businesses during the pandemic. Our plan was designed after consulting with Alberta's small-business owners and workers across this province. Unfortunately, since we released our plan, the UCP government has adopted only one of the proposed seven policies by expanding the Alberta small and medium enterprise relaunch grant from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and the UCP government has shown that it is the only thing that they are willing to do. The \$5,000 increase alone will not be the lifeline needed to keep many small businesses running.

Each of the seven points that we delivered addressed pervasive issues facing small businesses. For example, small businesses are in desperate need of rent subsidies and eviction protection. Most small businesses had not returned to pre-COVID levels before we hit the second wave. That is why we have called on the province to match the 25 per cent federal lockdown supports. Cash flow is another major issue, Mr. Speaker. That is why the UCP needs to reinstate the ban on utility shut-off and defer payments for up to six months. We've also called on the UCP to provide up to \$30,000 of government-backed loans so that small businesses have a low-interest option for their increased debt.

Most importantly, small businesses want clarity and the ability to plan. We are calling for a COVID-19 index so that they have the ability to plan when they move up and down a stage in the relaunch strategy. The measly \$5,000 grant on its own is nothing more than an empty platitude while businesses continue to close, especially when these owners are seeing that already-profitable corporations are getting billions of dollars from this government.

Minister, it's time for you to read our small-business proposals at [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca). We already did the legwork and consulted with Albertans. All you have to do is implement them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane is next.

#### Police Funding

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the southeast corner of the Legislature Grounds stands a memorial dedicated to fallen officers. The monument is called Pillar of Strength, and it is etched with the names of brave men and women who have lost their lives in the line of duty. If you look closely, you'll see spaces left blank because, as we know all too well, the names of the fallen is an ever-growing list.

The reason we honour those in service, Mr. Speaker, is because most of us recognize the dedication and selflessness required to put oneself in harm's way on a daily basis. The brave officers of our RCMP, sheriffs, and municipal forces are aware of the risk, yet they persist, even with the knowledge that one day they or their partners may appear on the Pillar of Strength.

Mr. Speaker, many, including some in this House, disregard this sacrifice in their calls to defund the police. They treat officers with contempt and vilify their names, all for the sake of appearing progressive. It is empty, dangerous rhetoric, used to elicit negative emotions with no basis in reason. Even a few seconds in response time can make the difference to a victim. Defunding officers will mean lives. That is a fact. Without considering the consequences, the regressive left repeatedly demonize the same officers who, ironically, would give their lives to protect them. This is reckless and shameful. We cannot claim to honour the fallen while at the same time giving any consideration to those wishing to defund the police.

On behalf of myself and my colleagues, thank you to all those who sacrifice in service, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

#### Premier's Remarks on COVID-19 Case Increase

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend my community in northeast Calgary was shocked and offended by the Premier's scapegoating and blaming the rise of COVID-19 cases on them. Let's be clear. The Premier didn't prepare for the second wave of COVID-19. He failed to hire contact tracers, and now we don't know the source of more than 85 per cent of COVID-19 cases. He failed to protect our children in school, and now many are forced to fend for themselves at home. He failed to manage outbreaks at continuing care centres, and now many people are dead.

What's more, as the second wave descended on Alberta, the Premier went missing. He went into hiding as our case count surged to the highest in the country. Then this weekend he had the audacity to blame my constituents for the COVID-19 chaos when it's actually his inaction that has put us in this situation. Mr. Speaker, my constituents are doctors, they are nurses, they are health care aides, they are cashiers, they are driving buses, and they drive cabs; they are doing the very jobs that keep our economy going, that the Premier claims to care so deeply about. What do they get? Not a word of thanks but rather insults from this failure of a Premier who will blame anyone but himself.

Premier, step up, take some responsibility, and manage this pandemic better. Also, shame on you for what you said this weekend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### Climate Change Science and Political Discourse

**Mr. Rowsell:** Mr. Speaker, my October 28 statement in respect of climate change drew a predictably reflexive response from the opposition. The demand that I be disavowed for the act of standing in a deliberative Assembly and having the temerity to be deliberative was, frankly, absurd. The Leader of the Opposition inferred that failure by the Premier to disavow my comments meant that he clearly agreed with them. This flawed conclusion is understandable coming from someone who controls a party in which groupthink is the dominant narrative and free thought is not tolerated. An example of this is the NDP's refusal to disavow the demeaning comments by their close friend and ally Gil McGowan, who calls those who don't agree with him religious nutbars.

I'm incredibly fortunate to belong to a party where free expression is encouraged and where our leader, as a formidable champion of democracy and free speech, encourages all members on our side of the House to be open and honest. I want to thank him for his continued integrity in this regard.

1:50

The practice of science depends upon the perpetual freedom to question and demand proof of any hypothesis. By contrast, dogma demands that no questions are asked. But don't take my word for it. Here are just a couple of many scientists of integrity who reject the current dominant narrative. Dr. Patrick Michaels says: the rate of warming on multiple time scales has now invalidated the suite of IPCC climate models; no, the science is not settled. Dr. David Wojcik says: the public is not well served by this constant drumbeat of alarms fed by computer models manipulated by advocates. Their words, not mine, Mr. Speaker.

I will not be intimidated into silence by condescension and name-calling and watch the opposition or anyone attempt to destroy the Alberta oil and gas industry based on a scientific narrative with weaknesses that should and will be challenged. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the time is now 1:50, but prior to Oral Question Period beginning, I'd like to let all members know here at the Assembly that earlier today your Speaker sent a note of congratulations to the new Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in Saskatchewan, Member Randy Weekes, the MLA for Biggar-Sask Valley.

#### Oral Question Period

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

#### Premier's Response to the COVID-19 Case Increase

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier waited weeks and months to start fighting COVID-19 with any significant measures, and as of this weekend Alberta now has the highest per capita cases in the country. At the same time hundreds of people gathered this weekend without masks in complete violation of the Premier's own health orders. These marches are superspreader events that increase community risk, trigger more cases, cause severe pressure on the health care system, and ultimately lead to more deaths. Premier: will you condemn these marches and the Albertans who so irresponsibly organize them?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is quite right to be concerned about the continued increase in the case count. That is in the context of the highest days of testing in Alberta, and

our positivity rate is very similar to that of our two neighbouring provinces. Nevertheless, we ask Albertans to be responsible in their actions. Obviously, when it comes to the constitutionally protected right to protest and the enforcement of these measures, that's a matter for the police to determine, not for politicians to interfere in. We would ask people not to engage in large-scale protests, and if they do so, please wear masks.

**Ms Notley:** So he won't condemn, and he doesn't appear to have trust in his own laws.

Now, the Premier did go on the radio to blame the South Asian community for the spike in cases and threaten them with fines of up to a thousand dollars. Meanwhile, he won't introduce a mandatory mask law for rural Albertans because he fears they won't comply. Why is the Premier so comfortable threatening to fine the people of northeast Calgary when he can't even pass a law to help ensure the health and safety of rural Albertans?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, as is so typical for the NDP leader, that is a complete misrepresentation of the facts. I did five interviews with South Asian media to convey the importance of the new public health restrictions, particularly given the fact that minority communities here and around the world have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. That especially is the case for people who live in high-density housing, which is why we will be increasing access to government-supported isolation for people who cannot isolate at home and increasing our efforts to communicate in nonofficial language media.

**Ms Notley:** How about increasing your efforts to communicate to the hundreds of people breaking the law this weekend?

Now, he's blaming multigenerational South Asian households, but he ignores the fact that these same Albertans disproportionately make up doctors, cab drivers, nurses, grocery store workers, health care aides, and many are the tens of thousands cleaning hospital rooms during COVID. These essential workers are at increased risk because of their work caring for Albertans. Premier, why don't you understand that spread is higher in these communities because you are failing to protect Albertans against the second wave?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP is the only political party in Canada that is obsessed with blame. No one is to blame for contracting COVID. No one is to blame for transmitting COVID. I believe that every Albertan – well, almost every Albertan – is acting in good faith to prevent this spread. I was very clear in commending those communities for being in public-facing jobs, often doing essential services where they cannot work from home. The reality at the same time is that many homes in neighbourhoods in the hot zones have high housing density, and we need to do more to help those folks with issues like self-isolation.

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

**Ms Notley:** How about helping them in their workplaces?

#### Essential Service Provider Wage Supplements

**Ms Notley:** The Premier refuses to acknowledge the risks front-line workers face and the danger to all Albertans if that risk means that they can't do their jobs. Now, Ottawa offered wage top-ups for essential workers more than six months ago. Today this Premier is blocking \$300 million meant for Alberta's health care workers, correctional officers, first responders, and more. He's the only Premier in Canada who refuses to support our first line of defence. Premier, why, in the middle of a pandemic, are you working so hard to stiff front-line workers?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. We're supporting front-line workers at every location in every way. Our minister of labour is working with his federal counterpart at securing tens of millions of dollars. They're assessing the situation on the ground. There will be announcements in the future.

**Ms Notley:** Other provinces have been assessing for months, and they got the jobs done.

Now, last week this Finance minister said that he received money. Then he said that he was still negotiating. Then his office refused to confirm any available funding. Mr. Speaker, these workers are at greater risk of contracting COVID today than they were in the spring because of this Premier's negligence. On top of that, he now wants to pass legislation to weaken workplace safety and cut workers' comp. Premier, just what is it about front-line workers you hate so much that you'd rather make their jobs more dangerous instead of giving them hazard pay?

**Mr. Kenney:** You know, Mr. Speaker, just listen to that kind of language: throwing around blame, division, accusing the government of, quote, hating front-line workers. I mean, not even Pravda would try whoppers like that. When it comes to wage top-ups, this government delivered tens of millions of dollars in wage top-ups to health care aides, for example, in long-term care settings, but it took, I think, three months for that money to get delivered. Why? Because the NDP, through its affiliate the AUPE, refused to allow us to send them the money. Shame on them.

**Ms Notley:** The government is lying. Tens of millions of dollars is not \$300 million.

Moreover, they are attacking them. Last week your Finance minister said that nurses, police officers, firefighters, teachers, and more don't contribute to our economy. News flash: like all of us, they pay taxes, they spend their salaries right here, and they also keep us safe. What the Premier turned down was a \$300 million injection into our economy from Ottawa. Will he look into the camera and explain to front-line workers why his ideology and petty political fights are more important than the essential work of these important Albertans?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, working with the federal government like other provinces do to roll out the specifics of a program is not petty. It's not political; it is responsible administration. The NDP has been filibustering the following motion for the past several months: resolve that this Assembly

condemn the actions of public-sector unions who are blocking a proposed wage top-up for health care aides in continuing care . . . and express its gratitude to the hard-working health care aides who are helping to keep Alberta's most vulnerable people safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Ms Notley:** Shameless.

**Mr. Kenney:** I agree, Mr. Speaker; the NDP is shameless.

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

#### COVID-19 Statistics and Health System Capacity

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier failed to prepare for the second wave, and he failed to act even as it crashed



into Alberta. The number of Albertans fighting for their lives in intensive care has more than tripled this month, and it is far past the benchmark of 70 that Dr. Hinshaw set. Now AHS is forced to take beds away from other patients to care for the flood of Albertans infected with COVID-19. To the Premier: how many ICU beds are occupied by Albertans with COVID-19 today, and what is the projected number of COVID patients in the ICU in the next two weeks?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, we will be releasing detailed numbers with respect to health care capacity in the days ahead. I can assure the hon. member that, thanks to the diligent efforts of Alberta Health Services and front-line workers, we are continuing consults to open up additional spaces. I will remind the members that in the spring we were able to set aside 650 ICU beds with ventilator support, and we are on track to have that kind of capacity, but we certainly hope that Albertans will respond to the most recent restrictions to bend down the curve so that that should not be necessary.

2:00

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, what we have seen is that this Premier has spent his time pandering to the extremist fringe of antimaskers in his own caucus or attacking the residents of northeast Calgary. Meanwhile AHS is repurposing 400 beds for Albertans infected with COVID-19. That means that over the coming weeks thousands of other Albertans with serious medical conditions will be told to wait at home and worry and suffer through the holidays, and that's just one part of the real human cost of his cowardly response to the crisis. To the Premier again: how many Albertans with COVID-19 are in non-ICU beds today, and what is the projected number in Alberta hospitals over the next two weeks?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, the numbers are released in that respect every day, and the member should know that we're at nearly 460 beds occupied by COVID-19 patients in a system with 8,500 beds, and AHS is well on the way to being able to identify around 2,200 beds, both acute-care and intensive care, should that be necessary. Let us hope it is not necessary. Ultimately, that's up to Albertans to respond positively to both the restrictions and guidelines articulated by the government last week.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans can respond, but it's this government that will wear responsibility for what occurs because even as our hospitals are packed full with the critically sick, AHS is running short on oxygen. In a memo sent out to all Calgary hospitals on Friday, the executive director of respiratory therapy said that they need to immediately reduce the demand for oxygen in our hospitals and provide patients with the lowest levels they can tolerate. It's one of the most disturbing images of an overwhelmed hospital system. To the Premier. We're running out of oxygen in the hospitals of our largest city. How did it come to this? Why did you not act sooner?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. This is continued fearmongering on behalf of the NDP. This is a contingency plan of AHS, as they do throughout the year, and they've advised health care professionals to use oxygen when it's clinically appropriate. This is something that happens often throughout any given year. It's just unfortunate that we continue to see that member and the NDP trying to fearmonger and scare patients in the system.

### COVID-19 Outbreaks in Seniors' Care Facilities

**Ms Sigurdson:** The deaths of nine more Albertans were reported yesterday; eight of those Albertans were seniors living in continuing care. Eight more families joined the hundreds already grieving a loved one. The Premier once promised to build a wall of protection around seniors, but those words are empty, considering he has done nothing to slow the spread. Even his grab bag of half measures last week had absolutely no new help for seniors in long-term care. Premier: why do seniors' lives mean so little to you?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, the opposite is true, and that's why we work with AHS and Covenant and the many operators that operate our continuing care facilities, including long-term care and DSL. We work with them to develop a package of \$170 million in additional funding for them so that they can have additional staff, so they can have additional resources to be able to build that wall around the vulnerable and that staff. We're going to continue to work with them as we continue to respond to the pandemic and make sure that those operators are going to have all the resources that they need. That's the right thing to do.

**Ms Sigurdson:** We all remember the Premier's disgusting comment that many of Albertans dying in this pandemic had already lived past their life expectancy. Mike Conroy, president of the Brenda Stafford Foundation, calls this systemic racism. Quote: I think we could have done more to prevent the vulnerability of those in continuing care centres. End quote. Premier: why was it more important to you to keep casinos open than to care for Alberta seniors?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. As I just said, the seniors are our prime focus in this government in being able to respond to the pandemic. We know that they're the most vulnerable to this disease. We're going to continue to work with AHS as well as with our continuing care operators to make sure that the most vulnerable, including seniors, are going to be at the forefront of our response to this pandemic. That's the right thing to do. We're going to continue to make sure the measures we take are going to be focused on making sure that we're going to protect the most vulnerable, including our seniors, in this province.

**Ms Sigurdson:** David Cowling's brother Donald lives in one of Brenda Stafford's facilities. He says, quote, there's no reason for why this should be happening; there's no reason for all of the suffering; we didn't even put in remotely the adequate resources to protect the vulnerable. And he's right. This Premier has handed out \$4.7 billion to his corporate friends but failed to produce a staffing strategy to keep Albertan seniors safe. Premier, why did you break your promise to the Cowlings and all the other seniors living in fear during this pandemic?

**Mr. Shandro:** We see, Mr. Speaker, that instead of being worried about COVID and worried about patients and worried about the vulnerable, the NDP are busy using class warfare rhetoric in their questions. That's what they're more focused on. We're focused on patients. We're focused on the vulnerable. Quite frankly, we have done everything, and we've been working with our continuing care operators. We've been working with AHS to make sure that those resources are there to be able to protect the vulnerable. We're going to be focused on patients and not class warfare rhetoric.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has the call.

### Commercial Driver Training and Licensing

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is an exporting province. Our oil and gas, forestry products, agricultural goods from beef to wheat to canola products, along with manufactured goods are demanded by the rest of the world. We also have grown demand for freight transportation, but we can't get those goods to market or parcels to our doorsteps without drivers. Alberta is expected to have a shortage of 3,600 commercial truck drivers by 2023. Given that trucking jobs are well paid and in demand in Alberta, can the Minister of Transportation inform this House what barriers are hurting our trucking industry?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Trucking is a key industry in Alberta. Without it, we couldn't feed our cities or get our goods to market. From September to October the Minister of Transportation met with truckers, foresters, roughnecks, and farmers across Alberta. They told us that between the cost of a class 1 licence, mandatory entry-level training, and insurance they couldn't afford to hire new drivers. MELT is a North American standard. That said, access to training is a serious problem for Alberta's economic recovery. We're taking action to improve access to class 1 licences to keep Albertans safe.

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that the cost of getting a class 1 licence is prohibitive and is hurting our economic recovery and given that while MELT is necessary, the average cost for mandatory entry-level training to get a class 1 licence in Alberta is \$8,900 and given that it takes 113 hours in a classroom and behind the wheel to complete, so few companies have the resources to put brand new drivers through that training, never mind unemployed Albertans, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to address cost challenges to improve access to truck-driving jobs?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Alberta's government announced significant changes to boost Alberta trucking jobs and training by improving access to a class 1 licence. The new driving back-to-work grant program will make the mandatory entry-level training required to earn a class 1 licence more affordable. The new experience and equivalency program will reduce the time it takes for class 3 drivers to upgrade to a class 1 licence. Providing better paths to earn a class 1 licence will help to deal with the shortage of truckers and build Alberta's economic recovery now.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that this is very reassuring news – providing unemployed Albertans with financial support and recognizing safe drivers' experience will create jobs now and in the future – and given that the experience and equivalency program reduces the number of hours a driver spends in MELT from 113 down to 40 and given that the minister knows that the MELT program was brought in to make Alberta roads safer, to the same minister: will the changes he announced last week make Alberta roads less safe?

**Mr. Toews:** No, Mr. Speaker, they do not. Drivers need to have at least two years of class 3 driving experience before taking the experience and equivalency program. All MELT students will still need to pass the class 1 MELT knowledge and road tests. Chris Nash of the AMTA told Global Lethbridge on Friday: "You're not sacrificing safety" because the "folks that are experienced with it, have been working with it." Let me repeat. Our steps to improve access to a class 1 commercial licence do not affect the high training and safety standards required by MELT. Alberta's government remains committed to keeping our roads safe.

### Homeless Shelter Capacity and Emergency Housing

**Ms Renaud:** On April 27 we called on the UCP to develop a proper emergency plan for homeless Albertans by putting them up in vacant hotel rooms. The UCP ignored our calls despite concerns from advocates and homeless Albertans about crammed, unsafe living conditions. Now we have a crisis. On Sunday alone the shelter at the Edmonton Convention Centre reported 37 cases among residents, and we've heard that staff are also infected. To the minister. You failed to act in the spring. Will you please do your job now and get these Albertans hotel rooms to live in before more get sick?

**2:10**

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do know that COVID restrictions have in fact resulted in reduced spaces for those who are experiencing homelessness at shelters across the province. That is why our government has provided an additional \$73 million to homeless shelters and community organizations to protect people struggling with homelessness during the pandemic. That money is being used to expand shelter capacity by adding additional sites where needed and special isolation facilities for those who have in fact tested positive and cannot be accommodated in regular shelters.

**Ms Renaud:** Given we've seen repeated media stories about Albertans who need a warm place to sleep but who are steering clear of emergency shelters due to fears about lacking physical distancing and sanitary measures and given that not providing these Albertans with a place where they can feel safe to sleep without the threat of contracting a deadly virus is a clear failure on the minister's part to do her job, what do you say to Albertans you have left with no safe place to sleep?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, currently there are more than 2,400 Community and Social Services funded beds across the province, and over the past week, while that number changes by the day, the average capacity was anywhere between 64 and 78 per cent on any given night. I do understand that overall capacity – although that was the capacity for last week, that number is increasing, and the minister has remained committed and is in conversations with community-based organizations to make sure that spaces are available right across the province for those who need them.

**Ms Renaud:** Given this government is also forcing more Albertans into debt and potentially at risk of being out on the streets with their refusal to continue the eviction ban, harmful cuts to programs like AISH, a failed plan to create jobs, and on and on and on, and given this government now has had nine months to secure sufficient affordable housing for Albertans struggling to make ends meet

during a public health emergency and economic recession, to the minister: will you restore funding you've cut for housing and bring forward a plan for emergency housing with supports immediately? Albertans can't wait any longer, and they need more than talking points.

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that, as I've said before, the Minister of Community and Social Services and the Minister of Seniors and Housing are working together not only to address the needs of those Albertans who may be experiencing homelessness, especially at this unprecedented time, but also to transition people into housing. They continue to work not only at the provincial level but with the other two levels of government, municipal and federal, as well as alongside community partners who are providing direct supports for those in need.

### COVID-19 Protective Measures and Teachers

**Ms Hoffman:** Mr. Speaker, Dr. Hinshaw has directed Albertans to try to work from home if they can, including employees of the provincial government. As of today hundreds of thousands of grade 7 through 12 students are also working from home, but their teachers were told that they must physically come in to school to provide online instruction. Letters from multiple school districts say that this direction came from the Minister of Education. Is it true, and if so, why is the minister preventing teachers from working from home?

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that the reality is that the plan that was introduced by the Minister of Education, in partnership with education partners right across this province, has in fact worked as today only .1 per cent of staff and students have active cases of COVID-19. Students are safe at school now, and they will continue to be safe when they return, as are staff. I do want to sincerely thank, as a parent of a student in the public school system, administrators and teachers for all the work that they've done and all the work that they continue to do as we transition grade 7 to 12 students to at-home learning to keep community transmission numbers low.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that the answer to the question is yes, the minister gave that direction, and given that the direction defies common sense let alone public health advice and given that every teacher who can work effectively from home is one less person in the school, one less person at the gas station, one less person potentially transmitting COVID while our case counts are soaring, our contact tracing has collapsed, and our hospitals are overwhelmed, will the minister reverse her decision and her direction to school districts and allow teachers who can to work from home if they so choose?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say this, that since day one the NDP have continued to disrespect the advice that we have received from our chief medical officer of health, Dr. Hinshaw, claimed that schools are not safe, and that could not be further from the truth. Only one-tenth of staff and students currently have active cases of COVID-19, and schools continue to be safe for staff and students. The NDP knows full well that we are currently in a state of public emergency. This decision to temporarily transition students is to contain community transmission and spread.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that it's 15 per cent of schools that had active cases of COVID in Hinshaw's update on Friday and given that teachers and kids in school who are now sitting at home alone without being able to be with their peers or with somebody else who can care for them – and given that this will become a safety issue when the minister keeps kindergarten through grade 6 students at home in January but still insists that teachers must go to school today and until the time in January when students are welcomed back and given that the minister clearly made up this plan in a hurry and that it was a mistake, will she do the right thing for students, for staff, and for families and let teachers who are able to work from home do so?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that I'm grateful for the work that the Minister of Education has done in collaboration with school division partners right across this province to ensure that students and teachers are kept safe. The member opposite knows full well that staffing decisions are in fact made at a local level, and we continue to work with them on any decisions that are made. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane is next.

### Provincial Fiscal Update

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Budget 2019 the government put forward a plan to balance. Through this budget government set out to create prudent and targeted measures to relieve the fiscal burden for future generations. This plan was interrupted by the unanticipated events of a global pandemic, a recession, and an oil price war. Revenues at all levels of government deteriorated as a result. To the Minister of Finance: what financial anchors is the government using to guide Alberta back to fiscal sustainability?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Early indicators this year, in fact, showed that Alberta was on track towards a balanced budget. In fact, we were ahead of schedule, but that was before we were hit with the triple black swan event. The MacKinnon panel report concluded that Alberta is an outlier in terms of our costs to deliver services relative to other provinces. One fiscal anchor will be to ensure that we're delivering services at least as efficiently as other provinces. We're also looking to ensure that we have balance sheet strength, and in that way we will use a net debt-to-GDP ratio . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is clear that damaging global events have drastically impacted the revenue of Alberta's treasury and given that in order to balance the budget, we need to recapture the revenue lost because of the pandemic and given that economic growth lifts up Albertans, helping them to care for their families and improve their quality of life, to the Minister of Finance: what is the plan for stimulating economic growth while realigning the goal of a balanced budget?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economic recovery and growth are critical to our fiscal health in the medium and long term. That's why we rolled out the economic recovery plan early. The economic recovery plan consists of strategic capital investments that will position this province to be more competitive and productive, attract increased private-sector investment, and create tens of thousands of jobs right now. It also includes the job-creation tax cut, the acceleration of that tax cut, which will, again, position this province to disproportionately attract investment, create job opportunities and, eventually, wealth for the province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the Alberta government delivers services at a much higher cost than other Canadian provinces such as B.C., Ontario, and Quebec and given that Albertans expect the government to stretch every one of their hard-earned dollars as far as it can go and given that this need is greater now than it has been in Alberta's history, to the same minister: what progress has government made in containing non-COVID operational-related expenses?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Our mid-year report showed that our total expenditures are actually \$156 million below Budget 2020 when we remove COVID costs and economic recovery costs. Although we're facing significant challenges, we've been making progress on expense management. Especially in challenging times like these we owe it to Albertans to find better ways to deliver programs and services and to ensure that they're delivered in the most efficient manner.

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

2:20

#### Northeast Calgary Concerns

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier insulted my constituents and my community with his insensitive comments this weekend. Let's be clear that northeast Calgary is in a COVID crisis. While the rest of the city is seeing case numbers in the range of 100 to 200 per 100,000, we are seeing more than 700. Many of my constituents work on the front lines and don't have the luxury to work from home. They need action from this government. To the minister: what specifically will you do to help northeast Calgary? For starters, you can get up and apologize.

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

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier has been going out along with many of us to be able to help and protect all of the communities. This protection comes from information, information that – it seems to me that the NDP would prefer that there would be barriers for this information to these very, very important communities, communities that have been hit the hardest, to reach out with data and information and recommendations in appropriate languages and methods of dispensing that information. That's what we're doing.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that this government is refusing to access and provide top-up pay for the heroes in the community working on the front lines of the pandemic and given that for many residents in northeast Calgary, if they don't work, if they need to go into isolation, they lose their income and possibly even their jobs and

given that this stress and fear over lost income are warranted because for many the loss of one paycheque could result in months of missed payments, will the minister finally do the right thing and provide top-up pay to these workers and set up a proper, sustained sick pay program . . .

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

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to reiterate some of the most important things that are going on right now, which is outreach to these communities. We've actually held at least 15 town halls with many of the communities that the member is talking about to talk specifically about what is needed. I very much appreciate the question because if we look at our communities, our culture, faith, families, friends, businesses, and offices, the importance about opening up the sectors so that people could go back to work was the most important thing. In fact, the opposition would have liked to have seen an entire lockdown and a shutdown, stopping people from actually being able to go to work. We actually want to see people go to work. That's to make sure we can keep the economy running.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that northeast Calgary was devastated by a record hailstorm and months later the government still has not offered proper support to repair people's homes in our communities and given that this government is once again leaving northeast Calgary behind by ignoring the community's massive spike in COVID-19 cases and ignoring the workers in their time of need, to the Premier: why do you care more about helping profitable corporations with a \$4.7 billion corporate handout but you're not willing to do anything to help northeast Calgary while you're putting them at risk?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly want to acknowledge the hardship that many Calgarians and others faced with the hailstorms this past summer. I know that Calgary MLAs have worked closely with their constituents, helping them navigate the insurance process, and, of course, this government also responded with a disaster recovery program for that area. We're also implementing the Alberta economic recovery plan, which in the medium and long term will provide jobs and opportunities for Albertans. That's ultimately what's needed. That's what we're delivering.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Mountain View is next.

#### Hydrogen Strategy

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that hydrogen should be part of our future energy strategy and an integral role in our economy. That's why we in the NDP released a hydrogen strategy as part of the Alberta's future project. Our plan will get Albertans back to work immediately and start building infrastructure to export hydrogen to the rest of the world. Meanwhile the government's proposal is just a plan to make a plan years from now. Why is this government delaying taking action to grow jobs in our hydrogen industry when we could create jobs today?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, this government is not delaying anything when it comes to hydrogen. As the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has said many times in the House, we are working towards a plan in partnership with industry. It is fairly

rich coming from that hon. member, who just had four years and did absolutely nothing when it came to hydrogen, in fact, spent her time in government attacking the energy industry in our province and going out of her way to make sure that they could not succeed and spent her time trying to tax hockey moms and hockey dads when it comes to dealing with things like climate inside our province. Instead, we're focused on real investment and real action.

**Ms Ganley:** Given, Mr. Speaker, that a plan to make a plan is not action and given that there is a huge global interest and that tens of billions of dollars are invested in the production of green hydrogen, which is lower emission and can be stored as a renewable energy source, and given that international markets are looking at green hydrogen to meet their climate targets and that according to Morgan Stanley green hydrogen could become cost competitive with blue hydrogen as early as 2023, why is this government ignoring green hydrogen when the rest of the world is moving in that direction?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, we're not ignoring green hydrogen or blue hydrogen. In fact, this year alone we are investing over three-quarters of a billion dollars in the technology innovation and emissions reduction program on things like hydrogen in partnership with industry, over \$1.9 billion towards technology advancements on hydrogen and other technologies to help with GHG emissions and to put people to work. That's created over 9,000 jobs in the last few months inside our province. That's a sharp contrast to that member, who spent four years and didn't even know the word "hydrogen" until she made it over into opposition.

**Mr. Sabir:** Point of order.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** This side of the House is focused on real work, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to work with our industry across this province.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 2:26.

**Ms Ganley:** Given that our NDP plan would immediately start to build a hydrogen industry in Alberta that would attract large-scale hydrogen products by making targeted investments and given that our energy industry has seen thousands of layoffs – and this government's response is to sit idly and pray that a bogus \$4.7 billion corporate handout will someday create even one job – and given that the government doesn't even plan to start exporting hydrogen until 2040, does the government still believe that economic diversification is a luxury, or will you adopt our strategy and create jobs now?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, in fact, actually, I withdraw and apologize for the last comment about the hon. member not hearing the word "hydrogen." I'm sure she heard the word "hydrogen," but she never said it inside this place or stood up for hydrogen or our energy industry when she was in government.

We will not be lectured by that member when it comes to being able to move forward with jobs and energy investment inside this province, Mr. Speaker, because that member and her former government did absolutely nothing to help our largest industry. Again, our focus right now: three-quarters of a billion dollars invested in new technology by the Alberta government this year, including hydrogen, a stark contrast to the NDP, who did nothing.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

### Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program

**Mr. Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's recovery plan is a bold and ambitious plan that is intended to create jobs with shovel-ready projects across the province. One of the ways that Alberta's recovery plan will do this is by investing in infrastructure projects across the province such as the strategic transportation infrastructure program, also known as STIP. This program improves accessibility, enhances safety and efficiency, and extends the service life of key transportation infrastructure in the province. To the Minister of Transportation: how much money in total has been allocated across the province through STIP?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Strategic municipal infrastructure is key for promoting economic growth and improving travel for residents and industry. That's why Budget 2020 maintained funding for STIP at \$61 million over three years to maintain and improve local roads, bridges, and community airports. Recognizing how important STIP projects could be to Alberta's economic recovery, we announced an additional \$50 million in STIP funding for 71 projects as part of Alberta's recovery plan, to be executed across the province.

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

**Mr. Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that creating jobs across the province is a key part of boosting our economy and given that in my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod and in many others across the province we have seen funding come from STIP and given that many of my constituents are wondering how many jobs this is creating, again to the Minister of Transportation: how many jobs has STIP funding created?

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. Investing in our transportation infrastructure is one of the best ways and most proven ways to create jobs now and promote economic growth in the future. STIP funding announced as part of Alberta's recovery plan will directly and indirectly support approximately 485 jobs across 71 projects throughout Alberta. As the name implies, these projects are all strategic in nature. By improving safety, accessibility, and the efficient movement of goods and people, these projects will create jobs now and in the years to come.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there's an eligibility requirement for projects to receive funding from STIP and given that STIP covers a large area of transportation concerns that funding could go towards and given that many areas of Alberta still need funding to go towards their transportation needs such as maintaining highways, to the same minister: what is the basis of eligibility for a project to receive STIP funding?

2:30

**Mr. Toews:** STIP funding is delivered under four funding streams with different cost-sharing arrangements depending on the project type. Alberta Transportation then evaluates projects on a number of criteria, including safety, traffic volumes, cost-effectiveness, collaboration with industry, other municipalities, or Métis settlements, and whether alternate funding sources are used. Municipalities can contact the infrastructure manager in their local

Alberta Transportation regional office and visit [alberta.ca/stip](http://alberta.ca/stip) to learn more.

### Economic Recovery and Women

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, the government continues to repeat the fiction that there's no cause for concern about the impact of the pandemic and economic downturn on women. Just last week the Minister of Children's Services said that almost as many women have returned to work as men, but this was based on an outdated report from early August, prior to September, when, as predicted by many except the UCP, thousands of women left the workforce to stay home with their children for at-home learning because they didn't trust this government's school reopening plan or they couldn't afford child care. To the minister of the status of women: will you finally recognize that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women and actually provide an economic recovery plan that helps them?

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

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's get the facts straight. We have recognized the disproportionate impact on women since the beginning, but to suggest that women are not able to come back from this is, again, the NDP attack on women, their viability, their competencies, and their ability to be able to come back from this. Never ever have I been so proud to work with such an incredible, incredible group of people who are so well positioned to be able to come back postpandemic. As we see the numbers, women are coming back to work, and that's because we reopened the economy.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. Well, given that that was an attack on rational thought and given that a November report by RBC titled Canadian Women Continue to Exit the Labour Force has more recent data indicating that 20,600 women fell out of the workforce while 68,000 men have joined it from February to October and given that the report is clear that this inequity will get much worse in the second wave unless there is a clear and strong investment in education and child care and given this government is so clearly cherry-picking information to hide their party's economic missteps and failure to invest in either education or child care, will the minister finally start listening to facts, to Alberta women, economists, and banks to make decisions for women's place in the economic recovery?

**Mrs. Aheer:** Yes, facts: very important. I would like to remind the member opposite that what she is talking about is a pan-Canadian report. Alberta has a significantly different report, thanks largely in part to the work that's been done with the government and the organizations in this province to make sure that people can get back to work. What the member is referring to is a document that does not talk about Alberta in any meaningful way. In fact, from April to October an estimated 143,400 women have entered back into the workforce. That's approximately 55 per cent. Is there more to do? Yes, and we will do it.

**Ms Pancholi:** Once again, outdated information.  
Given that this most recent report . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member used a preamble in the previous question. I'd prefer that she followed the rules just like other members.

**Ms Pancholi:** Given that that's outdated information and given that this most recent report shows that women aged 20 to 24 and 35 to 39 are exiting the labour force faster, are most exposed to hardest hit sectors, and are overrepresented in work where they can't work remotely from home and given that many women in these sectors are typically low-wage earners and racialized, like South Asians, a group that the Premier openly blamed this weekend for the high spread of COVID-19, and given that reports and evidence – yes, evidence – and countless experts continue to point to how women are being hit harder by this pandemic while this government sticks their head in the sand, will the minister look at the facts and tell Albertans what she is specifically going to do for women?

**Mrs. Aheer:** Mr. Speaker, when the opposition calls for a lockdown, who do you think that that impacts more than anybody? Disproportionately women. When the Minister of Education opened up the schools, what was the very first thing that the opposition said? Shut down the schools. What was happening when we were opening retail, which disproportionately impacts women? They said: shut down retail, shut down tourism, lock it down, and stop the work. These are women on the front lines who deserve to be able to get back to work to be able to help grow back this economy, 51 per cent of the population.

### Usage-based Automobile Insurance

**Mr. Carson:** Mr. Speaker, the UCP have been clear that they do not care about increasing insurance premiums. Even though Albertans are driving less, the UCP are fine with Albertans paying more. To make matters worse, the UCP also do not care about Albertans' privacy. The Privacy and Access Council of Canada has come forward criticizing the expansion of usage-based insurance, which will involve the tracking of drivers, potentially even while they're sleeping. To the minister. You are already letting insurance companies take every dime they can from Albertans. Why are you letting their privacy be taken, too?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that the opposite member's allegations simply are unfounded. Any usage-based insurance program would be voluntary in nature. It would be reviewed by the Alberta insurance rate board to ensure that it is compliant with all of the privacy laws and rules. Again, it would be voluntary in nature, so there would be no breach of privacy law with usage-based insurance. What it would do is create flexibility and opportunity for Albertans to receive reductions in their premiums.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, given that the UCP have not been clear with Albertans about the invasion of privacy that is within Bill 41 and given that as a result of the invasion of privacy in the legislation, president of the Privacy and Access Council of Canada Sharon Polsky said, quote: this bill should be halted in its tracks. To the minister. Your handling of the insurance file has robbed Albertans of their hard-earned income, and you have made matters worse during this pandemic. Now it is clear that you want to hand over Albertans' privacy as well. Will you listen to the Privacy and Access Council of Canada and immediately halt this horrendous piece of legislation?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be no breach of privacy, and Albertans' data and privacy will not be impaired with Bill 41. Again, any usage-based insurance measures will be voluntary in nature. What we are doing is that we are dealing with

the substantive issues that have pushed up costs in automobile insurance. Bill 41 will result in reduced premiums for Alberta drivers.

**Mr. Carson:** Given the UCP claim to support civil liberties but when it comes to helping insider lobbyists and allies, they will sell out Albertans in a heartbeat and given that insurance companies are reaping the benefits of skyrocketing premiums because the UCP has done absolutely nothing to control them and given we've seen companies like Intact report hundreds of millions in profits, to the minister: please explain to Albertans why insurance companies that collectively stand to net a billion dollars in profits this year should also be able to spy on the people they're charging outrageous premiums to.

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The party that was in government that did nothing about automobile insurance premiums are represented by the members opposite. They did nothing to deal with the substantive issues that were pushing up the costs of automobile insurance. They put a rate cap, which was a Band-Aid solution on the problem. It resulted in fewer and fewer options. This government will not make that mistake. We are bringing comprehensive reforms that will result in reduced premiums for Alberta drivers.

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

#### COVID-19 and Seniors

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that one of the most urgent needs throughout this pandemic has been to make sure our seniors stay safe. We also know that many seniors live alone. We can't forget that these seniors living alone are often disconnected from their loved ones, their families, and we can't forget the toll that that takes on people's mental health. I've heard that from my constituents. To the minister: what are we doing to support seniors with mental health during this crisis?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question as I know that this is something that he is very passionate about. Many seniors are in fact alone and unable to connect with family and their social circles right now due to isolation and parameters and steps being put in place to protect them throughout the pandemic. As such, our government has provided funding for mental health supports as well as funding for civil society partners who are supporting seniors living in their communities. Our civil society partners are ensuring the health and well-being of seniors who may be struggling with their mental health and personal needs.

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

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that people are social creatures and we seek community, we crave belonging, and both of these instincts are of course limited to many seniors and double so throughout this COVID-19 pandemic, to the same minister: what is your ministry doing to help create a sense of community and belonging for seniors and to combat isolation?

2:40

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We supported the development of the CORE, Collaborative Online Resources and Education. This is an online knowledge hub to help community-based senior-serving organizations co-ordinate their efforts to address the needs of seniors in Alberta during the COVID-19 pandemic but also beyond. By hosting online discussions and making resources available right across the province, organizations can focus their efforts on supporting seniors in their communities. These supports, along with the funding I just spoke about, will enable nonprofits to continue supporting seniors experiencing additional challenges at this time.

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

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for her response. Given that COVID-19 has forced many things to be put on hold – visits from family, social gatherings, and even uses of social spaces within senior facilities – and given that I have been told by my constituents that there are also much-needed repairs and delayed upkeep in certain senior homes in my constituency, how is your ministry ensuring that the proper maintenance of senior facilities is continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is prioritizing capital maintenance and renewal funding in areas of greatest need and ensuring that we make the best use of taxpayer dollars and that vulnerable Albertans, including seniors, have a place to call home. The capital plan 2020 allocates \$417 million over three years and will provide more than 3,000 jobs to Albertans and 2,000 new and regenerated units. In May we accelerated funding of \$26 million for 82 new projects for seniors' housing to ensure that our seniors' lodges are maintained to the standard our seniors deserve.

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

#### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Toews, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act the Report of Selected Payments to the Members and Former Members of the Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended March 31, 2020.

**The Speaker:** We're in the middle of the Routine and at points of order. I'm not sure if you're rising to speak to a point of order or what your desire is here.

**Mr. Schow:** I rise to ask for unanimous consent, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** At the end of the Routine you're more than welcome to do such a thing.

Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 2:26 the Deputy Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

## Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(j), “uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.” I think that in this Chamber you have provided many rulings that when members ask questions, government can get up and answer those questions or try to answer those questions. We may or may not agree with it, we may or may not like it, but I think that everything is done with an understanding that government will engage in a manner that is respectful to this House and to other members. In this case, the Government House Leader gets up and basically says that the hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View doesn’t know the word “hydrogen.” My colleague is a pretty well-educated, learned person, who was Minister of Justice and Solicitor General for four years for this province, and she is now the critic for Energy. She has presented two or three proposals to diversify the economy. She certainly knows the word “hydrogen.” She is working on that plan. I think we can disagree on what we are doing or what the government is doing, but I think it’s not appropriate for the Government House Leader to insult members of this Legislature like this, that they don’t know the word “hydrogen,” and when he gets up to correct or apologize, then he also just mocks and says: oh, I meant to say that she may have heard but doesn’t know. It’s the same behaviour where he would say things that are not appropriate for this House and, with that, he will add, “I retract and apologize” but would say it anyways.

I think that it’s clearly a point of order within the meaning of section 23(j). That’s the kind of language that is insulting to the members of this House, that is the kind of language that should be avoided in this House, and I urge you to find this a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

I’m not sure that your intervention will be needed.

As noted by the hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader, an apology and a withdrawal were made in the subsequent answers. I might point him to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who made an apology in this Assembly just last week, with even stronger language used in that apology, and the Speaker did not judge the sincerity of such an apology but accepted it on its merit.

The other thing that I might add is a reminder. As we all head towards the end of a session, making comments like “given that that answer was an attack on rational thought” – these are the same sort of differences of opinion, directed at individual members, that certainly could be received as insulting. I encourage all members of the Assembly to govern themselves accordingly with respect to decorum inside the Assembly.

An apology was offered, it’s been accepted, and I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika, I believe, was rising earlier.

**Mr. Schow:** I sure was, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for recognizing me. I rise to request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8(1) to move immediately to consideration of Bill 205, Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act, in Committee of the Whole, at the conclusion of which, if there is time remaining, the Assembly may return to Written Questions.

[Unanimous consent denied]

**The Speaker:** We are at Ordres du jour.

## Orders of the Day Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

### Anti-Racism Advisory Council Reports

- Q2. Mr. Deol:  
How many agendas, minutes, and reports on key measurement targets have been produced by Alberta’s Anti-Racism Advisory Council from May 1, 2019, to October 19, 2020?

### Public Agency Secretariat Board Positions

- Q3. Ms Phillips:  
How many applications for public agency board positions were received by the Public Agency Secretariat between April 20, 2019, and October 19, 2020?

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we are debating written questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has Written Question 1.

### Edmonton Lab Hub Project Cancellation

- Q1. Mr. Shepherd asked that the following question be accepted.  
How much was spent by the government to cancel the Edmonton lab hub project?

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Written Question 1. Now, it’s a matter of public record that the Premier and the UCP promised to cancel this important project during the election campaign, before they had actually had the opportunity to speak with any public servants, to review the actual data about what was involved with that project and what such a cancellation would in fact cost.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, this is a building that was already under construction. Now, clearly, there are going to be significant costs to backing out of a project like that. There are going to be contract cancellation fees, there’s going to be the cost of the land remediation, and so on. To be clear, this is Albertans’ money, so they deserve to have transparency around how it is being spent and the effects of this government’s decision. They deserve transparency on all decisions made by this government.

2:50

Unfortunately, what we’ve seen in their 19 months in power so far: this government has rarely provided it. Indeed, it’s often been quite the opposite. Just this past April a number of journalistic organizations here in Canada awarded this government the code of silence award for outstanding achievement in government secrecy in the provincial category. Not bad for one year in business at that time, Mr. Speaker.

Just four weeks ago we saw one of the most embarrassing audit reports ever issued regarding an Alberta government’s books, issued regarding this government’s first year, that same first year for which they received the award for most secretive. To quote the Auditor General: the numbers of errors we addressed in this audit were significant.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it went beyond just mere errors. There was intentional work to move things like AISH payments from one month to the next, to make that change just to make the books look a little better, downloading incredible chaos



and cost onto the backs of some of the most vulnerable Albertans, just one of the many things this government did to try to make their books look better, move money around, try to hide things from Albertans.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we know that this Minister of Health is in the process of making a number of other decisions which could have profound impacts on quality of care for Albertans, that could indeed affect costs for the health care system, claiming savings that he cannot actually quantify, telling 11,000 front-line health care workers, who are currently on the front lines of a global pandemic, that they may not have a job next year because he's looking to cut their positions from our public health care system and cannot quantify the dollar amount he intends to save by doing so.

Given that we know that this government is already tendering the privatization of the lion's share of our laboratory system across the province of Alberta, is musing about doing the same with EMS, it is incredibly important that this government provide real transparency to Albertans about the actual costs of their decisions. When we are talking about the very first of those, the cancellation of the Edmonton clinical lab hub, I think it is reasonable to ask that they provide Albertans with the total amount that was spent, the total costs that were incurred as a result of that decision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre. I appreciate that this is the first time in the 30th Assembly that we have debated written questions or motions for returns, and I may have missed it, but when you rise to speak to a written question, you're actually moving acceptance of that question. So I just need you to say the words, "I rise to move acceptance of Written Question 1" or something to that effect.

**Mr. Shepherd:** You know, it just occurred to me, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to move acceptance of Written Question 1.

**The Speaker:** Amazing. I couldn't have said it better myself.  
The hon. the Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's position is that Written Question 1 should be rejected, and I encourage MLAs to vote it down. The NDP's Edmonton lab building was estimated to cost taxpayers nearly \$600 million in addition to the \$50 million that the NDP were proposing to spend on nationalizing DynaLife. These dollars are now being used to improve services for Albertans; for example, \$100 million in investing in AHS's operating rooms throughout the province to allow them to do more surgeries, allow them to do more volumes of surgeries, investing in those publicly owned operating rooms as well as over \$100 million in upgrades to the Peter Lougheed in Calgary – no; I think it was \$100 million to upgrade the Red Deer hospital as well as upgrades to the Misericordia in Edmonton.

Now, the opposition claims or has claimed previously that the Edmonton lab building would have drastically improved Alberta's pandemic response, but that's simply not true. It wasn't slated for completion until 2022 at the earliest, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to note that the proposal brought forward by the NDP was not supported by the Health Quality Council of Alberta report that was completed in February 2017.

By not directing these needed resources towards the ideological goal to nationalize DynaLife and by instead having the resources to be invested in the correct ways, the smart ways in our public lab system to be able to respond to the pandemic, it actually allowed our labs to do excellent work. Alberta has one of the best testing regimes in Canada to respond to the pandemic. In fact, on Sunday

our labs hit a record high of over 23,000 tests in one day. That's because we were able to spend our resources in smart ways to best respond to the pandemic.

As I said, the net cost of cancelling this project was savings of over a half billion dollars that are now being invested to improve wait times and upgrade important health infrastructure in Calgary, Red Deer, and Edmonton. The Edmonton lab building is the perfect example of the NDP's manipulation, quite frankly, of the health system, Mr. Speaker, putting their ideology ahead of the interests of taxpayers and patients.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 29(3). Are there other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to provide the mover five minutes to close debate. The hon. the Member for Edmonton-City Centre to close debate.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very simple question: how much did the government spend to cancel the contract, remediate the land, and other assorted costs for their decision to cancel the Edmonton clinical lab hub? The minister replied with a lot of partisan nonsense. He made a number of attacks on our proposal and our intent. Let's be clear: the minister is free to disagree with the decision that we made as a government. That's his job, to make that decision, but it is also his job to be transparent and accountable to Albertans about what his decisions cost.

If indeed these are the great savings that the minister claims, if indeed this was the right and correct decision for him to make, then it's a very simple thing for him to simply tell us how much that cancellation cost. The minister stood and spoke for a number of minutes and did not even come close to answering that question. He gave a very broad figure. He said that he saved over \$500 million, just like he's going to save some phantom amount by laying off those 11,000 front-line workers and by all these other decisions he is making.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are getting tired of this charade. They are seeing through this government's bluster and obfuscation. At a time when we are in the midst of a global pandemic, one of the biggest health crises we have faced as a province, Albertans have utterly lost faith in this government. The minister had an opportunity just now to restore a small piece of that, to demonstrate that indeed he cares about providing Albertans with straight and true information, and once again he chooses partisanship over actually providing the facts. It's an accusation this government loves to fling across to us. Well, here was a chance for them to live up to their own apparent standard, and they have utterly failed.

We will continue to hold this government to account for its decisions. I guess we will see. I guess it's entirely possible that this Assembly will vote to support the written question – I suppose we will see – but I am disappointed that this minister feels that he owes no accountability to the people of Alberta, whom he was elected to serve and to represent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 1 lost]

3:00

### Motions for Returns

[The Acting Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

### Canadian Energy Centre

- M6. Ms Ganley:  
A return showing copies of all documents, including but not limited to business plans, agendas, minutes, ministerial orders, and directives, prepared by the government between April 16, 2019, and October 16, 2019, relating to the incorporation of the Canadian Energy Centre as a provincial corporation under the Financial Administration Act.

### Public Agency Secretariat Competition Matrix

- M12. Ms Phillips:  
A return showing copies of the competition matrix for each position posted between April 20, 2019, and October 19, 2020, on the Public Agency Secretariat public agency board opportunities website.

### Public Agency Board Opportunities

- M13. Ms Phillips:  
A return showing a list of public agency board opportunities posted, including competition number, opening date, closing date, job description, and the ministry, agency, board, or commission seeking applicants, between April 20, 2019, and October 19, 2020, for which an executive or professional search firm was contracted.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me again. I appreciate that. I rise again to request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8(1) to move immediately to consideration of the important Bill 205, Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month Act, in Committee of the Whole, at the conclusion of which, if there is time remaining, the Assembly may return to Motions for Returns. [interjection]

**The Speaker:** Let me provide some context. I hear some challenges, perhaps, from the opposition benches. Because we have moved to a separate item of business, the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika is able to make a similar request that was made during a different item of business, be it Written Questions, and now the Assembly has moved to Motions for Returns. While I appreciate the sentiment, that is why this is in order.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has requested unanimous consent to move immediately, setting aside the business before the Assembly, to Bill 205.

[Unanimous consent denied]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf of the member.

### Provincial Highways Maintenance Contracts

- M1. Mr. Feehan moved on behalf of Member Loyola that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all service level changes in provincial highways maintenance contracts between March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020.

**Mr. Feehan:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I just want to take a little bit of time to talk about why it is very important that we have an opportunity to discuss this. We clearly are entering into the winter season, when highway maintenance, while it's important all year long, has a certain extra priority put on it in terms of taking care of issues. The highway maintenance duties, of course, include

emergency duties, winter maintenance such as snow removal and grading, line paintings and markings, vegetation control, asphalt maintenance, gravel maintenance, roadside management, bridge maintenance and cleaning, and highway lighting and signalling. All of these things are critically important to the safe well-being of citizens of this province, and of course they are indeed paid for by the citizens of this province through their taxation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We also are quite aware that in the province of Alberta these duties are not performed directly by members of the public service, so it is not the government itself that is engaged in the snow removal and the vegetation control and the highway lighting and so on, all of the things that I'd mentioned. Rather, these services are contracted out to various companies who have an opportunity to bid on these services and to deal with them.

In fact, in the province of Alberta these duties are contracted out to private firms, and it is done so in 25 different service areas in the province of Alberta plus, of course, the Deerfoot Trail and the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads. There are quite a number of contracts that are out there. Many of them, of course, are currently maintained by two companies, Emcon and Volker Stevin, but there are, of course, opportunities for other people to come forward and to seek these contracts.

It would be very important for us to know if these contracts are undergoing any kinds of changes, you know, the conditions under which these decisions are being made regarding these contracts, and we would just like to have an opportunity here to ensure that Albertans know that the services that they would expect to maintain their highways in a safe manner are being maintained at a level that will ensure the safety of citizens as they travel these highways.

As such, it would be quite important for everyone to be able to see what these contracts entail, particularly at this time, when the government seems to be getting rid of as many services as possible throughout the province and decreasing the services to the citizens of the province of Alberta, sometimes without properly informing the citizens of those kinds of changes in their service levels, which, of course, leaves the citizens unable to judge as to whether or not the services being provided by the province are commensurate with their needs as citizens who hope to travel these roads in a safe manner.

We'd like to know, if there happen to be, of course, people who are participating in the contracting bid-proposal system, that they also are aware of changes in the system so that they can adjust their proposals and their bids in future rounds so that they can ensure that they have the greatest chance of obtaining one of these contracts in these 25 service areas plus the three city-centred ones: the Deerfoot Trail, the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads.

I think it's important, given that we have the winter approaching, that we know whether or not indeed all of these things will be continuing in the way that they have in the past. As such, the way that this government could do that is to provide a list of all the service level changes in provincial highway maintenance contracts between the dates of March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020. As well as, you know, providing those lists of changes, we would certainly be interested if the minister should happen to be available at some point to explain the reasoning behind any kind of service level changes, whether or not there'd be any savings associated with those service level changes, and whether or not there are any increased risk factors associated with the change in the service levels to the citizens of the province of Alberta, all, of course, in order to provide the greatest level of transparency not only to citizens but to the people who are putting in bids in these contracts.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will cede my time for anyone else who may wish to address this motion. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising to let the opposition know that our intention is to reject this motion for a return. The member is asking for changes made to contracts signed between the government and highway maintenance contractors. Let me just say that had the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie asked for a list of all service level changes to provincial highways, that would have been an easy question to answer here, but what they asked for were all changes in provincial highways maintenance contracts.

3:10

Now, the difference is, Madam Speaker, that the member is asking for changes made to contracts signed between the government and highway maintenance contractors, and some of those fine details in these contracts, like most contracts signed by government or any other entity, for that matter, are confidential and not appropriate to be released.

However, the member is not without hope. If the member wants to learn about these policy changes made by government with respect to highway maintenance, there are appropriate venues to ask these questions. It occurs to me, Madam Speaker – and my memory may not be perfect here – that the member has asked on at least one occasion in the past in question period, although I would want my memory refreshed upon that, and probably got some of this information. Further, the member actually has the ability to ask at Committee of Supply or question period, and the member did actually ask questions of this nature during the Committee of Supply for Budget 2019 and again for Budget 2020. While I have to reject this particular motion for return, the member should fear not. The information about government policy is available at least through the other two means that I have just outlined in my remarks here.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join in on debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's discouraging for me to hear the Minister of Transportation say that he's going to reject this motion for return and then encourage us to look for the information elsewhere, where I can expect that the people of Alberta will also be disappointed because the minister will likely reject the request for information in those venues because that seems to be the pattern of behaviour with this government in general and this minister in particular.

I rise to echo my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie's request for returns so that we can have an idea of the service level changes in the provincial highways maintenance contracts. In particular, Madam Speaker, I wish to reinforce the need for the public to have an understanding of what is going on with highway maintenance with respect to salt contamination in the province.

Earlier this year I had a person who lives in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake area reach out to me by the name of Penny Kostura. She's a landowner, has land at the southeast quarter of section 17, township 68, west of the fourth. She's been given the runaround by Transportation for a number of years, and in fact I think it dates back to when the Minister of Transportation was in that role under Premier Redford. If he doesn't know of this case, he should because he's been in this position now for a number of years. That particular

issue hinges on the amount of salt that is applied to an intersection upon which her land borders. She's raised the issue of having to deal with contamination a number of times, is frustrated that she gets the runaround from the Transportation department. The department never seems to be able to take the kind of action that it needs to address the issue.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the Transportation ministry seems to be intent to make dealing with the issue even harder by imposing additional administrative requirements around getting annual compensation and the like. I only raise this issue because Ms Kostura was one who reached out to my office, but I know from personal experience, having worked in the environment ministry for a number of years prior to being elected to this Chamber, that these kinds of issues crop up in the Ministry of Transportation all the time. I believe that these contracts have conditions attached to them for how contractors should be dealing with these contamination issues, and we don't seem to ever get any answers from the Ministry of Transportation when it comes to what they're doing, if anything, to deal with these salt contamination issues that they continue to be causing.

Now, I'm not going to say that I'm standing in favour of not applying salt to the roads. I suspect that the Minister of Transportation will probably try to use that as a reason to reject this motion. That's not what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker. What I am saying is that the use of salt on the roads does cause adverse impacts to people who border these roads. They deserve to be compensated for the adverse impacts that they are experiencing because of these activities, and the Ministry of Transportation is refusing to deal with these adequately.

It's a matter of public interest that the public understand how Transportation contractors are required to deal with these issues when they arise, if at all, and what mechanisms the ministry has put into place for dealing with contractors who refuse to deal with these issues when they do arise, because I also know from personal experience, Mr. Speaker, that there's a lot of finger pointing that goes on when it comes to assigning blame for dealing with these things. The Ministry of Transportation says: no, it's not our problem; it's the contractors' fault. And the contractor says: well, it's not in our contract to deal with these highway contamination issues, so we can't possibly deal with it. Round and round we go. In the meantime the people of Alberta who are suffering adverse effects of these kinds of issues are left to suffer with no compensation on the horizon.

On behalf of the people, like Penny Kostura, who have been dealing with these issues with seemingly no positive resolution in sight, I urge all members to stand up for your constituents, vote in favour of this return so that the people of Alberta can at least see these highway maintenance contracts and understand what, if anything, the government is going to do to deal with these salt contamination issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The minister has already spoken. Anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. the Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion for a return. I just need to look at the text: "that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all service level changes in provincial highways maintenance contracts between March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020." Basically, what my colleagues have described is that the safety of highways, their

maintenance is important. Many of us are on the highways pretty much on a daily basis, and those who travel on QE II know how important it is, and it is important to keep the emergency services going, keep the economy going.

What we are asking here: we're not asking the minister to release all the confidential contracts. I don't know how confidential those contracts are. We are asking for the service level changes in provincial highways. For clarity, no one is asking the minister to provide all the contracts and which terms were changed. All we are asking is, pursuant to those changes in the contracts, how the service level for the maintenance of highways will be impacted. That's the information we are looking for. That's pretty basic information because I do remember that in the 2019 budget, there were some reductions in the highway maintenance budget, so it's a pretty reasonable question to ask, and I hope the minister will reconsider it. We are not asking for you to release contracts; we are asking you to release information, a list of all service level changes, how services will be impacted.

But if you don't want to share what you're cutting from maintenance, that's, Minister, your call. But the essence of this question is that it's an important issue for our constituents, it's an important issue for the constituents of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and I guess it's an important issue for all Albertans to ask the government how their highways are maintained and if they have made changes to the highway maintenance budget. I think it's a reasonable question to ask how those changes will impact their service levels.

I hope the minister will consider responding to this positively.

3:20

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to contribute to this motion that is before this House, Motion for a Return 1. It's so ironic listening to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Member for Calgary-McCall. You could see the hypocrisy in their line of commentary when, in fact, what they're asking for is the release of the contract. It's clearly stated in that particular motion. You can see that they have not even read, you know, their own MR 1.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also referred to his constituent not being satisfied with the Minister of Transportation way back from when he was the Minister of Transportation. You could see the irony in that commentary as well, meaning that his constituents were not satisfied as well with the members opposite when they were in Executive Council for the last four years, which he wished, you know, the Minister of Transportation – that was in his commentary as well. That is what we have . . .

**Mr. Schmidt:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order has been noted. Happy to hear the point of order. I hope this isn't an interjection to continue with debate, but I'll take you at your word.

#### **Point of Order Insulting Language**

**Mr. Schmidt:** No. Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't waste the chair's time with these kinds of frivolous points of order. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) the member is using insulting language and casting aspersions upon me, saying that this is something that we should have dealt with when we were in government. Of

course, the minister well knows that I wasn't in charge of the Transportation department when our party was in government. Of course, he's implying that I personally had the power to deal with this issue . . .

**The Speaker:** I appreciate the interjection. This is exactly what we do here. This is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here we go again, you know, on this MR 1. In light of those comments, it's obvious that the members opposite are asking for something that we would not be able to provide to them in light of the fact that they're asking us to release the contract. On that particular basis, I am going to urge all members of this Assembly to vote down this MR 1.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to the motion for a return. You know, I think the member was a little bit confused about what we're asking for. If you read the exact text, it says: "that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all service level changes in provincial highways maintenance contracts between March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020." Nowhere does it say that the contracts should be shared or released or disclosed. What it does say is "a list of all service level changes."

I think this goes to the point being made about transparency. Very quickly you see a lot of defensiveness about "Oh, you didn't do this" and "You did that" and "We can't show you this." What we're asking for is information that I think all Albertans should be entitled to. If there will be changes that will impact Albertans, I believe that they have a right to know. Certainly, we know that government is responsible for safe maintenance on highways, again, and they're tasked with making these decisions that impact our lives. These duties certainly are contracted to private firms, but we're not asking for that information. We're asking for the changes, and I think that that level of transparency is wholly appropriate to share with the people of Alberta unless there's something that you don't want them to see. Then I would suggest that maybe you want to rework your speaking notes because we are not asking for what you say we're asking for. We're asking for information. We're asking for transparency, and once again this government is on record and on display doing everything they can to avoid that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close debate.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to take a few minutes to close debate. Of course, I must express my disappointment that the government has chosen to be pedantic on this particular question, having noticed a word, "contract," then assumed that that meant we actually wanted the physical. I can explain that word to you later, afterwards. I think it's terrible that they would choose to look at a word and say: that word exists in this sentence; therefore, I can use that word to exclude actually doing what it is that the sentence asks for.

The sentence does not ask for the contracts at any time. What it asks for is a list of all service level changes in provincial highway

maintenance contracts. It's just a list of changes which would exist outside of those contracts. The government would have them on a record of policy changes. They would have them on a record of highways that they have and a record that says: you know, on this particular highway we are going to reduce the number of times that the road is plowed this winter from X number to X minus Y. All of that information is clearly evident and available to the government outside of the actual, physical contract. The contract is not being asked for in this particular case. What we're asking for is the nature of the changes to the services which are included in the contract. All of those things are clearly available.

I'm very discouraged that the government uses this ridiculous manner of denying the citizens of the province of Alberta some basic level transparency about their own safety as we approach this winter, a time when we're already under a great deal of stress because of the pandemic that we are living through, because of the complete failure of this government to handle this pandemic in an appropriate manner.

I think it's very shameful that they would continue to demonstrate that they have learned absolutely nothing from their gross failure with COVID-19 and throw us back in the same position where they're going to keep their decision-making a secret – they're going to make decisions that are going to affect the actual lives of people who travel highways in this province – from the citizens who pay for those highway maintenance contracts merely because they can do so on the basis of a trick being used with the English language to imply that somehow we were asking for contracts merely because the word “contract” is used in the request. It's really quite silly that they do that. It certainly shows their disdain for the citizens of the province of Alberta who may be concerned about their own safety, who may find themselves wanting to know whether or not their travel throughout the province of Alberta during this time of COVID is going to be made worse by the very government who's made the rest of their lives so much worse during COVID.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will close debate and invite all of the members of this House to vote in favour of this motion.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we are at MR 2. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

#### Provincial Highways Maintenance Contracts

M2. Mr. Feehan moved on behalf of Member Loyola that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents prepared by the Ministry of Transportation between March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020, containing or related to service level changes for provincial highway maintenance contracts.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity to rise on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to present the following motion. Here we are having an opportunity for the minister to move away from his intransigent position that denies the rights of the people in the province of Alberta the information they need for their own safety in this time of heightened concern for individual safety and to allow us to see the information, the documents prepared by the Ministry of Transportation, between these dates, March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020, containing or related to service level changes.

3:30

Now, I know that in the previous motion the minister used the ridiculous position that somehow contracts were being asked for and that they couldn't share those contracts. It is very clear that this time we are asking for the internal information, documents prepared by the Ministry of Transportation between March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020, related to service level changes for the provincial highway maintenance contracts, so this is the information prepared for the contracts, clearly in the motion, and not the contracts themselves.

I think that we're back in the very same position we were moments ago, before the government used their trickery to stop the citizens of the province of Alberta from getting the appropriate information in much the same way as they have done with the information provided by the chief medical officer with regard to COVID-19, where they have denied the citizens of the province of Alberta the information that would help them to assess whether or not the government's choices around in this case highway contracts and in that case COVID-19 responses – they denied the citizens the right to see the information that would allow them to be good citizens and to make good decisions about whether or not they support the government's choices or whether or not they wish to see the government change those choices because of the completely ineffective nature in which these decisions seem to be made and the failure of these decisions to actually protect the lives of citizens in the province of Alberta, as we have seen over the last number of months, where we have over some 500 citizens of the province of Alberta dying from COVID, in contrast to many other countries of approximately our size such as Australia, which does not have this same kind of problem, or New Zealand, which does not have this same kind of problem, but we do.

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** A point of order has been noted.

#### Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

**Mr. McIver:** Yeah. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), language designed to create disorder in the House. The hon. member is not even talking about the motion for a return. He's on a wide-ranging taking a swat at the government and really trying to make, frankly, points on the people suffering from COVID-19, on a procedural question. He's clearly trying to create disorder by going out of his way, essentially using the people suffering from COVID as a convenience. It's despicable, and I'd like you to rule it a point of order.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe that it's a point of order, and the member in no way, shape, or manner was making fun of those suffering with COVID. Instead, I think this side, along with this member, is on record asking this government to do something about people suffering from COVID. Having said that, I think the member did try to distinguish between Motion for a Return 1 and Motion for a Return 2. The first was about contracts, and he did explain that the second one is not about contracts. Rather, it's about information around service levels. I do not believe that this is the kind of language or that the context that my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford was explaining is the kind of thing that is covered under 23(h), (i), and (j), and I don't believe that it's a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I am prepared to rule. It would be uncommon to allow additional points to be made. I have from time to time accepted positions from others.

Seeing none, I'm prepared to rule. I would agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall that under 23(h), (i), and (j), language likely to create disorder, this is not likely a point of order.

However, on the point of relevance that perhaps the Minister of Transportation may have made, although he didn't in this case, I think it's a good opportunity for the Speaker to provide some caution. Particularly when moving a motion for a return, the member may also make arguments as to why the motion for a return should be accepted. I think it's pretty difficult to connect the current government's response to COVID to a motion with respect to contracts for the Transportation department, albeit this Speaker has provided wide swaths of latitude with respect to relevance, in particular during second reading of legislation or during committee. I think that it is a little bit different with respect to written questions and motions for returns. Similarly, when we're debating an SO 30, we're talking about why that's urgent. So I don't believe that there is as much latitude that's allotted to members with respect to motions for returns or written questions. I'll provide some latitude, but if the member could speak to the point at hand, I think we'd all be well served.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take the caution well in hand and will return to my request to this government to provide the information necessary for the citizens of Alberta to ensure the citizens of Alberta have a strong sense of their own personal safety in these coming winter months, knowing what changes have been made to highway contracts. Particularly, I think people are concerned about whether or not the roads will be appropriately plowed, appropriately sanded, or appropriately dealt with over the next number of months. Of course, they really should have the right to know this information because they simply are taxpayers who are paying for the contracts and therefore should have some understanding of the information that's provided by the ministry to the minister on which decisions are made that will indeed affect their well-being, that will indeed affect the satisfaction of their use of the roads, not only, of course, in these dangerous winter months but in the summer months, when, unfortunately, all too many individuals in the province of Alberta find themselves in trouble because of road conditions and unfortunately all too many people have lost their lives.

So I would ask the government in this particular case to let us know a little bit more about the information that is put together and to provide to us the documents provided within the ministry on the nature of the changes that will be affecting policy decisions with regard to issues such as winter maintenance, emergency duties, line painting, markings, vegetation control, asphalt maintenance, gravel maintenance, roadside maintenance, bridge maintenance and cleaning, and highway lighting and signalling. All of these are issues that are of deep importance to the people of the province of Alberta, and they certainly would like to know from this government what it is that this government is doing to protect their well-being.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the speaker gets time to review his comments in *Hansard* later on, I hope it will reveal to him that had the words on the motion for a return matched what he

said and asked about a policy change, it would be an easy question to answer. But actually referring to the point at hand, which is what's before us, the motion for a return, again, they go down to "service level changes for provincial highway maintenance contracts." Again, for the second motion for a return in a row the opposition's incompetence is their problem. Had they actually asked the right type of question, it could probably have been answered. As I tried to let them know in my earlier response, which applies here again, that question is easy to get answers to in question period, at Committee of Supply. There are many appropriate ways on the service levels, but when they go down the road of the contracts, which have elements that are not public – I appreciate that the hon. member that's speaking today isn't the one that is responsible for the motion for a return, but he is a lawyer and he is speaking to it.

3:40

I'm sure he probably understands the words better than I understand the words. The words include reference to the contracts; hence that's a big part of the reason why this question has to be rejected, Mr. Speaker, because it's about the changes in the contracts. It's quite a fishing trip. I have to actually give him credit for that. They want 19 months' worth of "all documents." That's ambitious. I think we can all agree on that. It would take a significant amount of time and resources, if the question was in order, much better spent. We have mechanisms for fishing trips, including FOIP, but the fact is that the opposition has again asked to look at all contemplations for changes to the contracts, which would include confidential information.

As a request the government will reject this motion for a return, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Is there anyone else that would like to provide comments to Motion for a Return 2? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion. The interpretation that the Minister of Transportation offered is the most restrictive one. In broad terms these motions are not looking for copies of the contracts, period. We're not looking for copies of the contracts. That's not the idea here. The idea here is that government, through the use of different contracts with different service providers, contracts out highway maintenance, which is squarely within the responsibilities of the Minister of Transportation, and we are asking if there were any changes to the service levels.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I don't think, as a lawyer, that you can contract out something that you're responsible for and hide behind that contract and say: no, no, no; I cannot tell you what I did do. Nowhere will any lawyer interpret that. I think these are the kinds of things that it's no wonder that the Canadian Association of Journalists gave this government the code of silence award for outstanding achievement in government secrecy. These are exactly the kinds of reasons that you got that award.

We are asking a simple, simple question: what were the service changes? What were the changes in those contracts, done with public money, that will impact the safety of our highways, the safety of highways that we travel on each and every single day, the highways that all of our supply chain travels on? That's important. The safety of those highways is important for Albertans, and we know for sure that there were budget reductions last year. And just contracting out responsibility and saying that you cannot release the

contract – no, Minister. All we are asking is: do whatever you need to do to protect confidentiality, which in this case I don't think applies, but provide Albertans with information on how their government, using their money, will provide for highway maintenance. If there will be any changes in those safety protocols, if there are any changes in those maintenance schedules, Albertans deserve to know because they travel on these roads.

That's essentially what these motions are asking for. We can go into the technicalities of all these things, but these contracts are also not confidential. You cannot hide behind contracts' confidentiality, using public money, about your responsibilities, about the maintenance of our highways and tell Albertans: "No. I entered into a contract with your money about my responsibilities, and guess what? You cannot look at that contract." That's not how contracts work, that's not how government works, and that's not how highway safety works.

That's why we are asking that this Assembly issue an order "for a return showing copies of all documents prepared by the Ministry of Transportation between March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020, containing or related to service level changes for provincial highway maintenance contracts." Those documents could include the reduction in their budgets. They're not actual contracts. We are entitled to see the contracts, too. This motion is asking for those documents "containing or related to service level changes for provincial highway maintenance." If there were some budget cuts, we need to see that. If there were some policy changes, we need to see that. If there were some reductions in service levels, we need to know that.

These things are important for our constituents, these things are important for Albertans, and insofar as these contracts are concerned, these contracts are entered into with public money, with our money, and Albertans are absolutely entitled to see these contracts. The government cannot hide behind these contracts to decline Albertans, to refuse to show how they're maintaining their highways. That's why I urge all my colleagues to vote in favour of this order.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I see the hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Very quickly, I just wanted to respond to the comments made by the Member for Calgary-McCall. You know, it was so disingenuous of this member referring to their request and ending their request at "maintenance," avoiding the word "contracts."

Madam Speaker, to be clear, MR 2 reads that the MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie proposes the following motion:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents prepared by the Ministry of Transportation between March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020, containing or related to service level changes for provincial highway maintenance contracts.

That is the motion before the floor of the Assembly.

Madam Speaker, the second point I want to make is to point out also that this really is out of order. They are asking for maintenance contracts that were in their possession whilst they were members of Executive Council. March 31, 2019: this government had not even been elected. I remind members of this Assembly that that election took place on April 16, 2019, so for all intents and purposes this motion is, quite frankly, out of order.

On those two points, Madam Speaker, I'm going to urge members of the Assembly to vote down this motion.

**Mr. Sabir:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on a point of order.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want you to clarify that the member is speaking about this motion or that he is arguing that this motion is out of order and should not be debated.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Sorry. How is that a point of order, hon. member?

3:50

**Mr. Sabir:** I just want clarification from you or the table. The hon. Justice minister is arguing that this motion is out of order.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, that is not a point of order which can be called.

**Mr. Sabir:** I'm kind of seeking clarification. We were debating about this motion. The member is arguing that it's out of order. If they are on the Order Paper . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, perhaps there's an opportunity for another member of your caucus to ask those questions, but this is certainly not a point of order.

We're currently in debates. I believe the hon. Minister of Justice has concluded his remarks. [interjection] Order, please.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hope to skate within the lines here this afternoon and actually try to make some progress as we roll down the highway with the government trying to keep us on track, within the lanes here. We're all trying to accomplish the same thing, and that's to ensure that our roads are kept safe and properly maintained and done so in the main . . .

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Madam Speaker, as it was rightly pointed out by my hon. colleague – he didn't actually call a point of order, but he certainly made the point – the motion for a return asks for documents beginning March 31, 2019. Well, the election wasn't till 17 days after that, so the motion for a return is asking for documents from before we were in government . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. minister, I hesitate to ask what standing order you are rising on under a point of order, which appears to be any.

With that, we will ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to continue with his remarks.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. After that interruption I have a little less time to speak to the motion. Perhaps that was the member's intent in rising. Nonetheless, I'll use the time that I have as effectively as possible to say that I know that the maintenance of our highways is important to everybody in this province, whether you be in business, whether you're simply travelling to get to work, whether your children are using school buses to get to school. They are absolutely critical infrastructure to us. It's the reason why we in the opposition are so intent on getting the details as to the expenditures that are made on our highways to keep our road surfaces maintained and our bridges properly replaced when necessary.

That's why with this Motion for a Return 2, Madam Speaker, we are fully focused on asking for information that is clearly related to the priorities of Albertans in keeping their roadways safe and properly maintained and upgraded and new ones built when needed.

It's of utmost importance to Albertans, especially in the winter season, to ensure that our roadways are up to snuff. We, of course, know intimately how important it is for things to keep moving during a time of pandemic, when we rely upon our supply chains, both internationally and interprovincially as well as throughout the province, to keep our economy moving. That's why it's so important that the investments in roadways be kept up.

Now, I'll give some credit to the government for an investment that was continued by them that was started by our previous government, and that is the expansion of the lanes in each direction, north and south, on the southwest leg of the Anthony Henday. It was a critical backlog area. A traffic jam happened every morning and afternoon as a result of increased traffic on that roadway, and this government has followed through on investments initially announced to upgrade that roadway. It's an example as to the type of documentation that we'd be looking for, Madam Speaker, when we want to actually verify what plans are in the works by this government to either continue or initiate more upgrades and maintenance strategies for our roadways.

There is certainly a lot of debate underfoot in this province right now about one of the strategies that the government has been looking to implement, and that is to toll new infrastructure. Certainly, there may be indications in the documentation we're asking for as to what the government's thoughts are with respect to that plan to add tolls to government infrastructure, to new infrastructure, particularly roadways.

I know that Albertans are keenly tuned in to this new development, and I venture to say, Madam Speaker, that the majority of Albertans were not pleased to hear that once again we're going to see a potential downloading of cost onto anybody but the provincial government, whereby a community or a county or a municipality that wishes to expedite the construction of a bridge or another piece of infrastructure will go to the top of the priority list if indeed they are willing to accept that the project be subject to a toll, which would be of course paid for locally by the users of that piece of infrastructure, rather than relying upon the general revenues of the province to pay for necessary general roadway infrastructure, whether it be in High Level or High Prairie or anywhere in between.

I realize, Madam Speaker, that the government would rather not have certain documents see the light of day, but they can be instrumental in outlining and detailing the various decision-making points which have caused the government to come up with some of the new plans that are now seeing the light of day such as tolling new infrastructure in the province.

I know that Albertans want their money to be used wisely. They want it to be used in a fair way, and many Albertans are questioning, in particular, this government's decision to move ahead with toll projects and wondering if indeed that is the most fair way of doing things. Once again, rather than bring the province together and joining each other and saying that, yes, indeed, a piece of infrastructure, a bridge for example, is a needed and necessary piece of infrastructure to be built now for the development of a certain area in the province or the maintenance of a roadway – however, it should be something that's paid for out of general revenue rather than pitting one area against another, which seems to be the government's predilection, and saying: look, if you want this road built, you can have it tolled.

Communities which want something done are now being told that they have to pony up a percentage, perhaps, of what the cost of the project might be, or the users, the local users, who are the highest repeat users of that piece of infrastructure, are the ones who will end up having to bear a disproportionate burden of the cost than

they would have otherwise if the general revenue funds had been used to pay for the infrastructure project, which has been the case in the past, and most Albertans would want it to be the case going forward.

I know that details are the source of a lot of daylight, and it's what we're after with Motion for a Return 2, Madam Speaker. We're asking

for a return showing copies of all documents prepared by the Ministry of Transportation between March 31, 2019, and October 19, 2020, containing or related to service level changes for provincial highway maintenance contracts.

Now, the maintenance contracts that the province issues are something that have bothered me for a long, long time. I remember an era in the not-too-distant past when we had a fleet of yellow and black trucks, which were actually government of Alberta highway maintenance vehicles, and they were very proudly driven and occupied by members of the public service who actually maintained our roads on a predetermined schedule. Inspections were done, and everything ran quite smoothly.

4:00

Of course, now we have private maintenance contracts and signage up on the roadways saying: this strip of road is being maintained by company X. Twenty miles down the road there would be another company looking after roadway B, not to mention that you can have an adopt-a-highway program, where family Y will look after a certain amount of the expenditures for maintaining the right of way or the roadway.

Again, Madam Speaker, we've had a devolution from public service to private contracting, which has sort of pitted one area against another, and that's not something that has necessarily been good value for money, although that's to be seen by doing such things as Motion for a Return 2 and maintaining a demand for all of the documentation that will reveal the changes in service levels for provincial highway maintenance contracts. I think that it's something that many Albertans simply don't think about a whole lot, but there is really a significant difference that can be shown in the longevity of a highway, in particular road service, given our harsh conditions of heat and frost and so forth.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, if I may provide some clarification to members of this Assembly. Firstly, when a point of order is called, the member's time stops until the point of order has been concluded with, so the member does not lose any actual speaking time allotted to them. Secondly, if I may, the Speaker and only the Speaker decides if a question or a motion for a return is in order. The Speaker has ruled that this motion for a return is in fact in order. If the government disagrees based on the fact that this government was not in power during that time frame, perhaps that is a reason to recommend that the motion for a return be rejected, which I think I have heard from the members of the government.

With that, are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie like to close?

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie I'd like to just take a few moments to close debate on this particular motion. I know that the last two motions were really centred around the question of a single word in the motion. I'd like to point out to the government that they, in fact, have the ability to amend motions if they do find something in the motion that prevents them from doing something that they would like, in fact, to do.

If indeed this government had chosen to respond to the citizens of Alberta by providing them transparency and providing them



information that will provide them with good knowledge about their safety on the roads and highways, the government simply could have chosen to amend this motion to exclude the word “contract,” if that’s one that they feel stuck on, in spite of the fact that it’s been quite clearly outlined that the contract is not being asked for but, rather, the information that leads to the contract.

So it’s disappointing to see that the government has chosen to take this route, that they’ve chosen to essentially fail to use the tools available to them and, instead, have chosen to stonewall the people of the province of Alberta when they seek knowledge about what it is that this government is intending to do.

I guess I will leave it at that, Madam Speaker, and ask the members of this House to vote in favour of this motion. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

### **Mandatory Entry-level Training**

M3. Ms Phillips moved on behalf of Member Loyola that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of briefing materials, SMS messages, and e-mail messages providing advice to the Minister of Transportation, including media preparation materials, prepared between May 1, 2019, and October 29, 2019, relating to mandatory entry-level training for class 1 and 2 commercial drivers.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’m looking to the chair for direction. May I speak to it now?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Yep. Go ahead.

**Ms Phillips:** Okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, this motion was put forward because we know that mandatory entry-level training was something for class 1 and 2 commercial drivers that was made a requirement, given the various reviews that came out of the Humboldt bus crash. Most jurisdictions, or many jurisdictions, anyway, across Canada undertook such reviews, and Alberta did the same. We did find that that entry-level training for commercial drivers – while nothing can bring back those hockey players, those kids, those, you know, brothers and other various folks that were on that bus at that time – is something that we could do in order to make our roads safer. It was found that there were steps that we could take to protect the public interest and to make sure that we are doing everything we can to avoid such a tragedy in the future.

However, there were many different comings and goings, if you will, Madam Speaker, on this issue. In fact, through last fall a year ago, pretty much right now, there was a very large public conversation around exemptions for that mandatory entry-level training, and those exemptions were deeply troubling to the families of the Humboldt bus crash victims, so much so that they took their time out of their grieving and trying to rebuild their lives or finding ways to move past the tragedy by contributing in the community, by donating many of the funds that had poured in during the aftermath of that crash – many of those families were really trying to move on from the tragedy, and this decision by the government to have a number of exemptions to the MELT training prompted them to visit this Legislature, prompted them to visit this Chamber, in fact, to call on the government to do the right thing.

Now, Madam Speaker, there is no question that there are costs associated with MELT, and there is no question that then the government has a responsibility to meet those public interest needs in order to uphold the highest standards of safety on our roads and also respond to the thoughtful Albertans that were making

reasonable interventions on behalf of highway safety in this province. These were grieving families, and the things that they were asking for were in no way, shape, or form over the top. They were not large, massive price tag items if the government was able to support the folks that had to undergo this training, if the government met the needs in terms of ensuring that there is enough testing capacity and so on.

Yet there seemed to be a fixation on providing exemptions to that mandatory entry-level training, particularly in some agricultural sectors and other sectors, as if a truck that is carrying grain is different than a truck that is carrying fertilizer, as the one in Humboldt was, I believe. At a rural intersection at night they are not different. They may be different in their application, but oftentimes in their size, in their complexity they’re not, Madam Speaker. That was the argument that those families were bringing forward to this Chamber.

4:10

The government’s excuse at the time and the reason why we are asking for these documents is that there was a lot of backing and forth. You know, the Premier indicated in the media that it’s a complex issue. The families said back – this is covered in the media on October 2, 2019 – that it’s not complex. They simply said that this is wrong, quote, particularly on the large, class 1 operations they are driving the same roads and highways like Mr. Sidhu was driving on the crash site. The families said things like: I thought this was solved. But it’s not solved because economics have gotten in the way of lives.

Now, we know that there were a number of decisions made and there were a number of trade-offs that were made around safety and around this issue. The public deserves some accountability for why the government came eventually to the decision that it came to and the kinds of supports that it then put in place so that we could have the appropriate levels of driver training for the appropriate level of commercial licence and the appropriate level of heavy trucking activity on our roads in order to keep our roads safe. Now, I will acknowledge – and I think this is really good – that the province brought in a driving back-to-work grant program to cover up to 90 per cent of the cost of MELT for unemployed Albertans. That is excellent, and that is exactly the kind of program that needs to be in place to make sure that we are both meeting the needs of the commercial vehicle sector in terms of having the skilled drivers that they need to move product from A to B but also to make sure that we are upholding the highest levels of safety.

We know that that kind of assistance and that kind of focus on results wasn’t always the case. The public deserves to know how all of that went down last fall so that we can avoid this kind of grief in the future, that we can avoid families having to travel several hundred kilometres up the highway just to make a common-sense argument in the wake of an unspeakable tragedy for their families and so that we know, Madam Speaker, the kinds of options that we have going forward in order to make sure we do have the appropriate labour force planning, we do have the right training supports in place, and we do have the right kinds of safety backstops for people driving on the roads, delivering all kinds of different products. It is for that reason that we are requesting these documents.

Again, you know, it is perfectly reasonable within the standing orders that if there’s a word or two that the government would like to litigate, they are welcome to stand up and amend this motion if they’re interested in a good-faith conversation both with the broader public but also the families of the Humboldt crash victims who were asking for certain public policy outcomes last fall and found that response to be quite wanting. If we want to respond where we learn

from our mistakes, where we know where the public policy gaps are, and where we make sure that we are upholding the right kinds of decisions and if there are exemptions – and it may be, Madam Speaker, that there might be the odd place where there is an exemption. That, too, I think the public would understand if they had all of the information in front of them rather than having that withheld from them.

That is why I'm supporting this motion, and I hope the government does, too. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. This particular request is for six months' worth of materials. It would take a significant amount of time and resources for department officials to compile, time that would be currently much better spent on focusing on Alberta's pandemic response and economic recovery. I'm certain the member would agree that officials should be focusing on those two priorities. This kind of request is, frankly, more appropriate to be handled through the FOIP process. I'm pretty sure the members across know that and are perfectly capable of filing a FOIP request, which is what I recommend they do for this type of request. As a result, I recommend that the government reject it.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join debate? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is something to hear the Minister of Transportation respond to these motions for a return. To suggest, first of all, that this isn't the appropriate way for the department to spend its time and then to turn around and suggest that we file a FOIP request so that we can pay \$90 to ask the department's staff to spend this time dealing with this request is absolutely ridiculous.

**Ms Phillips:** And in six months from now.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Six months from now. Exactly.

As my friend from Lethbridge-West has indicated, this is just an attempt by the Minister of Transportation to avoid answering the question. My friend from Lethbridge-West raised some significant questions around driver safety that, if answered, would serve the public interest, and the minister wants to hide behind the FOIP process. This is followed up by him hiding behind wording technicalities on other motions for a return all afternoon, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. McIver:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

#### **Point of Order Items Previously Decided**

**Mr. McIver:** Under 23(f) it refers to "debates any previous [motion] of the Assembly," which the member was just doing, "unless it is that Member's intention to move that it be rescinded." Now, I'm happy to hear any debate that he wants, but I don't think that he's allowed to create *Groundhog Day*.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is not a point of order. It's not. Basically, two moments ago the minister had the opportunity to respond to this request, and he said: go FOIP us. Previously he said: you put the word "contract" in it; not releasing it. We were not opening the previous motion to redebate or relitigate

it. It's just a pattern of behaviour that my hon. colleague mentioned, and there is no point of order here.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would tend to agree that this is not a point of order. However, I will express some caution. If any member in this Assembly needlessly persists in a matter which has already been decided in this House, that would certainly be out of order.

For now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your wise decision, and I certainly hope that the Minister of Transportation learns these lessons as we go along.

The point that I was trying to make before the Minister of Transportation made his failed attempt at a point of order was that the Minister of Transportation seems to be avoiding transparency here on all of the matters that have been brought forward before the Legislature this afternoon. It is offensive to the people of Alberta that we have to run such an obstacle course to get a modicum of transparency regarding provincial highway maintenance contracts and road safety here in the province of Alberta. I would challenge the Minister of Transportation to inform the House under what conditions he would see it fit to actually release this information in a timely manner. He spent a lot of time this afternoon, Madam Speaker, getting up and telling us why he can't release information, you know, making these pitiful arguments about technicalities and FOIP processes and whatnot.

I want to echo my friend from Lethbridge-West and my other colleagues here in the opposition who have said that there is an easy way around this. The minister can happily admit that the public interest will be served by increased transparency around these questions and amend the motions so that they are acceptable to him. But no, Madam Speaker. He likes to cast aspersions on the competence of members of the Official Opposition, which I would suggest is probably projecting on his behalf. He wants to cast aspersions on our competence and all the time dodge these questions of transparency.

4:20

I challenge the minister, and I challenge the members of Executive Council or any members of the backbench of the UCP government to tell us: under what conditions would they find it reasonable and appropriate to release this information to the public of Alberta? I wait eagerly to hear what the answers will be, Madam Speaker, but I suspect that this government is actually proud of the fact that it's been awarded the most secretive government in the country currently and that all that we're going to hear from members of the Treasury benches and their allies in the backbenches is that they don't see fit to give the people of Alberta the transparency that they deserve with regard to this matter.

That's all that I have to say about that, Madam Speaker. I hope that we see a change of heart from the UCP. Failing that, though, I sincerely hope that the Minister of Transportation reflects on the job that he's doing serving the people of Alberta and questions whether or not he can do anything better.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join in debate?

Seeing none, would the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West like to close?

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, you know, the fact of the matter is that this motion for a return was presented to this Legislature so that we could understand how the decisions were

made around exemptions for the mandatory entry-level training for commercial class 1 and class 2, which was a requirement that came out of a national tragedy, and it came as part of expert reviews of 16 Canadians who lost their lives as a result of a driver that was not properly trained on our country's roadways. It turned out that Alberta had a role to play in that. Regardless of party or background or any of those things, it was incumbent upon this Chamber to make those changes.

Now, when it came to light that those safety changes were going to be backpedalled upon, the families were very, very concerned, so much so that they took a great deal of time to visit this Chamber, to engage with the Minister of Transportation, to engage with his staff, to engage with the civil service, and to engage with the media and the opposition, which quite frankly is their right as citizens to do. They were perfectly respectful advocates, but they were forceful. I know that this minister has, you know, been in this business a long time, and I know that he met with them and he was sincere when he engaged with those families.

But the fact remains that we still had some outcomes around exemptions that were not necessarily in the public interest. The public deserves to know what kind of analysis was done, what the effect of exemptions would be on the safety of our commercial roadways, on the affected sectors, how to make those exemptions as narrow as possible and whether the government actually chose that course of action or a course of action that was more of a blunt force instrument, what kinds of options the minister ultimately weighed on how to make the policy work, and how the minister made sure that that entry-level safety was something that we could provide on our roadways in a way that was appropriately supported for the people who had to undergo that training and whether he simply left options on the table. Albertans deserve to know.

There are some Albertans – and I will read their words into the record – that are potentially the most deserving to know. On the exemptions, Shelby Hunter, whose brother Logan from St. Albert was killed, called the exemptions a terrible idea. Quote: as families we are after change, and I believe one day we will all live in a world where driver regulations are much stricter; it breaks my heart to know how many people's lives are at risk on these roads.

The Straschnitzki family of Airdrie also criticized the potential move in interviews and on social media. "Typical Govt," wrote Tom Straschnitzki on Twitter. "Come visit all 29 of us and explain why they would do this. Hope it never happens to any of their kids or spouses or relatives. If it did, betcha changes would happen sooner [rather] than later."

Now, Madam Speaker, that's why we need a good-faith conversation on the decisions that backed road safety, because at any one time it could be one of our kids, our spouses, or our relatives who get hit by a big truck screaming through a stop sign on a provincial highway that maybe needs more signage by a driver that does not have the appropriate level of training. That's why we need this kind of transparency and openness.

Like I said, if the government doesn't like the wording here, if they're going to be, you know, just sort of deliberately obtuse over the wording of the motion, then they can change the wording of the motion. They have a majority. We'd get that done right quick. They could edit it in any way they want in order to provide that basic evidence.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has moved on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie Motion for a Return 3.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of my colleague I wish to advise this House that we will be withdrawing Motion for a Return 4 and also will withdraw Motion for a Return 5 on behalf of my colleague because that information is now publicly available. Motions 4 and 5: I wish to advise this Assembly that I'm withdrawing on behalf of my colleagues.

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

### Alberta Dental Fee Guide

M7. Mr. Schmidt moved on behalf of Mr. Shepherd that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents prepared for and by the Ministry of Health between May 1, 2019, and October 19, 2020, relating to the Alberta Dental Association and College's dental fee guide.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise. Now, this is a matter of critical public interest. Just to give the House a little bit of historical context, in case anybody needs to be reminded, the former PC government of Alberta abolished Alberta's dental fee guide in the 1990s, and for a number of years after that time the cost of dental care rose steeply as dentists were free to charge whatever they felt like to their patients for various procedures. This made Alberta an outlier with respect to the cost of dental care. Alberta was the only province in Canada that didn't have a fee guide, and as a result we found that dental care in Alberta was the most expensive and also the cost of dental care was rising more quickly in Alberta than in any other province at the time.

[Ms Glasgo in the chair]

Now, our government did reintroduce this concept of a dental fee guide during our term. It didn't compel dentists to change their fees, but it definitely started conversations with patients, and we did see that fees began to level off and in some cases fall, which is certainly good for Alberta families. I don't need to remind members of the House that the years since 2014 have been incredibly challenging economically, and many Albertans, of course, have lost their jobs or have had pay cuts or certainly haven't seen their wages go up, so it's important for a government to make sure that costs for vital services like dental care also remain affordable for most Alberta families. Our government was proud to at least take that step with respect to introducing a fee guide.

4:30

Now, it's very disappointing, Madam Speaker, to see that the first fee guide that the UCP Health minister introduced targeted a 5 per cent increase in fees, and it's funny to me that at a time when the Health minister wants to shame medical doctors for how much money they make, issued a fiscal statement last week that claims that nurses are only a drain on the resources of Alberta, that they don't provide anything of value to the province of Alberta for the salaries that they're paid, physiotherapists, diagnostic imaging techs, and so on – it's strange that he seems to be prioritizing dentists above all of these other health professionals by allowing for a 5 per cent increase in their fee guide, especially at a time when dental fees in Alberta are still among the highest in the country.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This is what this government is known for, Madam Speaker. It seems as if they look at who already has the most money, and then they decide to shovel more money into their pockets. That's not just

with respect to increasing dental fees. It also seems to be the case with the corporate tax cut, right? We see \$4.9 billion funnelled into the most profitable corporations in Alberta while average . . . [interjection] Right. We see insurance companies, of course, who are profitable to the tune of a billion dollars a year, making sure that the average driver pays more in their insurance while insurance companies' executives can, you know, spend more of their windfall profits on ivory back-scratchers.

It should be no surprise that this government seems to be intent on helping those who need the least help while making sure that the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who have lost their jobs or are unemployed or are underemployed right now see their dental fees grow increasingly out of reach, Madam Speaker. We believe that it's a matter of urgent public interest that the government release these documents so that we can understand why it was that they made this decision to allow dental fees on the guide to go up by 5 per cent.

Now, I just want to address some of the attempts at arguments that we've heard coming from the government bench and soon to be opposition benches with respect to motions for returns. Note, Madam Speaker, that the date referred to is May 1, 2019, long after these guys have taken over, so I hope that, you know, the Minister of Justice doesn't try to say: well, we couldn't possibly deal with this because . . . [interjection] If the Minister of Health is intent on discussing with me some aspect of this motion for a return, not only does he have time during debate to offer that, but I can give him my address so he can come and yell at me on my driveway as well in his free time if he wants to.

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member. Go ahead.

#### **Point of Order Language Creating Disorder**

**Mr. Schow:** Sure. Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), using language to cause a disturbance within this Chamber. Madam Speaker, I think that we are all very clearly here to debate matters at hand, that are in the best interests of Albertans and our constituents. I don't think that throwing personal attacks at the hon. Minister of Health is necessary. He is indeed an honourable man, an honourable member of this Chamber, and a member in good standing. I wish the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would act as such as well. I'd ask him to withdraw that comment, and let's proceed and raise the bar.

Thanks.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, do you want to stand up? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. My colleague was debating a very serious motion relating to health, and the Minister of Health had all the time after he had moved it . . . [interjections]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, hon. members.

**Mr. Sabir:** The Minister of Health had all the time after it was moved to get up and speak to that motion, and he continued heckling the member while he was speaking. While it's not desirable to bring back and talk about what the Minister of Health did on someone's driveway in my own community, I don't think it's a point of order. I think that if the minister wants to raise the

bar, he wouldn't engage in heckling across the aisle when a serious motion like this is debated.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, I'm not sure heckling is a reason to cause disorder and personally insult another member in this House. I think the only reasonable course of action, as I do believe this is a point of order, is for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to apologize.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I apologize for my comments regarding the behaviour of the Minister of Health and withdraw.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Schmidt:** I would like to continue with respect to the motion for a return. In fact, I would like to just remind the House that, of course, we've heard a number of arguments coming from the benches across the way about how they couldn't possibly provide the information that has been requested in these motions for returns. I was highlighting that the date, in fact, coincides with the members opposite taking over government on April 30. This is May 1, 2019. It doesn't refer in any way to contracts. So I sincerely hope that the Minister of Health doesn't, you know, try to use any of those kinds of arguments about why this can't be dealt with.

Perhaps he's going to stand up and say that the Ministry of Health staff can't spend their time dealing with this issue. I would remind the House that, of course, if the minister doesn't want to comply with the motion for a return, then somebody can file a FOIP request and ask that the ministry end up spending its time gathering this information in the first place, Madam Speaker. I certainly hope that the Minister of Health or somebody else from the Treasury benches stands up and just says that, yes, it is, in fact, in the public interest for the people of Alberta to be able to look at the documents that were prepared for and by the Ministry of Health relating to the Alberta Dental Association and College's dental fee guide so that we can have some insight into the decision-making process that the ministry engaged in when they allowed dental fees to increase by a maximum of 5 per cent.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not surprised at all that most of that time that the member was arguing was spent on the NDP's continued obsession with untrue stories about me. I find that quite humorous, that they continue to be obsessed with these bizarre stories, but let them.

Look, let me also say this. The member started referring to compensation for physicians and talking about physician compensation disclosure as shaming physicians. Nothing could be further from the truth. Let me point out to the NDP that during their four years in government physician compensation increased by 23 per cent. Physician compensation increased 23 per cent during their four years while nurses took four zeroes. Madam Speaker, that was their priority when it came to the health system. They'd rather continue to see one part of the budget continue to increase significantly, money that could have been spent much better in the rest of the system. But that wasn't their priority.

4:40

I'd also point out to the member that on one hand he admits that the fee guide cannot compel a dentist to provide fees at a certain rate, but then he somehow says that it is the Ministry of Health or the government allowing these rates, which is completely untrue.

But, look, Madam Speaker, regarding the question related to Motion for a Return 7, given the fiscal climate our government urged the Alberta Dental Association and College not to increase the fees in a tough economy, where many families throughout Alberta were facing financial hardship. We were disappointed, after that input, that they decided to choose to raise their fees. The 4.4 per cent increase, we on this side of the House think, is far too high when dental fees in Alberta, as the member pointed out, are already much higher than in other provinces. That's why we encourage Albertans to compare rates, and we encourage dentists to be transparent and consider the fee guide rates as maximums.

As the member himself pointed out in his argument, we do not dictate dentist fees. We do respect their independence as self-employed professionals. We did express, again, our concern that we did not want to see for a second time an increase, especially in this economy, especially while all families throughout Alberta are facing these financial hardships. With that, Madam Speaker, the information on Alberta's dental fee guide can be found online at [dentalhealthalberta.ca](http://dentalhealthalberta.ca).

With that, I encourage members to reject the motion for a return. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate in support of this motion. It is interesting that the Health minister just stood up and talked about the fact that he encourages dentists to be transparent and then yada, yada, yada. I would encourage the government to be transparent, and that's particularly what we're aiming for with this motion. What we're asking for is some information, so let's be clear:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents prepared for and by the Ministry of Health between May 1, 2019, and October 19, 2020, relating to the Alberta Dental Association and College's dental fee guide.

Just to piggyback a little bit on some of my colleagues' comments, I think that, you know, we're clear that we did have a cap, and then suddenly there were some changes. We saw an increase, and I think we can all agree that Alberta families are struggling right now. They are struggling with increased school fees even though most of their children aren't in school. They are struggling with increased insurance rates, premiums. They're struggling with all kinds of fees. So I think it is in the best interests of Albertans that we ask this government to do something they have not been particularly good at until this point, to be transparent and to share their information and their documents with Albertans so that Albertans know precisely how this played out.

With that, my brief comments, I will take my seat and encourage members to support this motion. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join debate? Seeing none, would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar like to close?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank my friend from St. Albert for her thoughtful interventions in this debate. I want to remind the House of words that I've heard the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills say a number of times in debate in this Chamber: to trust but verify.

I will say that maybe I trust the minister. Maybe I take the minister at his word that, in fact, the government did have discussions with the Alberta Dental Association and College about the wisdom of proposing a 5 per cent fee increase, and maybe they

did actively discourage the dentists from doing so. If those discussions took place, then show us, Madam Speaker.

I don't need to remind members of the House that this government and this minister in particular have a serious trust problem with the public of Alberta when it comes to almost every matter of government policy. If the minister is intent on rehabilitating his reputation with the public of this province, which I sincerely hope that he is, then take this opportunity to take a small step towards rehabilitating his reputation and release the documents that we have asked for so that we can see if we can actually take the minister at his word on this matter of dental fees.

For that reason, Madam Speaker, I'm certain that all of my colleagues here in the Official Opposition are keen to see whether or not we can trust what the minister has said with respect to his discussions with the dentists. I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of this motion and encourage the minister to show us the proof that what he said is true.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

### Medical Device Reprocessing

**M8.** Mr. Sabir moved on behalf of Mr. Shepherd that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports received by the Ministry of Health from Alberta Health Services between May 1, 2019, and October 19, 2020, relating to medical device reprocessing.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's also the kind of information where we do want to sincerely trust the government that it's happening. We just need to verify that.

Medical device reprocessing is not the most glamorous aspect of health care, but it's one of the most critical ones. This term is used for all the people and equipment and facilities and processes that are needed to thoroughly clean and sterilize medical tools and equipment so that they can be safely reused. Some of these need to be sometimes dismantled and reassembled. It's not the public-facing part of health care that we see, but the consequences when it fails can be catastrophic.

Some members may remember an appalling scandal at St. Joseph's general hospital in Vegreville in 2007 under the previous Conservative government. It was discovered that thousands of people had been treated with surgical tools that had not been properly cleaned or sterilized. That's a horrible thought. They found surgical tools with spots of blood still on them and dead tissue. They discovered some tools were just being cleaned by running them under some tap water. These tools were used in surgeries, in biopsies. They had to close the hospital down to everyone except emergency patients, and there was a full investigation by the Health Quality Council of Alberta. Back then, that council used to report to Albertans.

As a result of that, the entire leadership team at the hospital was replaced, and thousands upon thousands of Albertans had to be tested for the impacts of hepatitis, HIV, and all of those things, because of this failure of the medical device reprocessing. It led to class-action and individual lawsuits as well. Clearly, there is a significant public interest at work here.

4:50

There was another case at the Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary in 2014 under the previous Conservative government, and at that time it was discovered that the machines that did the washing and

sterilizing of devices had lost some of their parts. Those machines cleaned surgical scopes for endoscopy and other medical processes. Clearly, what we are asking is in the public interest, and we just need to clarify that this process is happening. Especially during the middle of this pandemic, we cannot not do all this. We just need to verify that, and I hope that the Minister of Health will consider providing that information.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. We reject this motion. AHS has previously taken corrective action to address medical device reprocessing and audits progress in this area. Unlike the member opposite, I think that this actually is quite an important part of the health care system. It's important for us to be able to ensure that all the processes are done correctly to ensure the safety of patients. Understandably, the timeline for the corrective action that's being done by AHS has been interrupted by COVID. This process is currently on hold for the time being while AHS directs all of its efforts towards the response to the pandemic. There is no information to share at this time. Any information that will become available will be included in the AHS annual report to the ministry on infection prevention and control, which will be publicly posted when it's received.

For those reasons, Madam Speaker, I encourage the Assembly to reject Motion for a Return 8.

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

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this. I'm discouraged to hear the Minister of Health's remarks, first of all, falsely stating that the previous speaker did not value the workers who do this important work with regard to medical device reprocessing when, in fact, he said that while it is not glamorous, they are extremely important. The complete misrepresentation of what was previously said is not okay.

More on point, because I'm sure you want me to stick to the point, is that there have been a number of incidents where there are problems with regard to medical device reprocessing. They are extremely important to be dealt with because they, in fact, have the potential to cause grievous harm or even death for members of the public. In the event that they do not cause any actual physical or medical harm to anybody in the public, they certainly add dramatically to the health care costs. After discovering that a device has not been appropriately cleaned or reprocessed before being reused, AHS typically then calls in all the people who have been serviced by that device and has to re-examine everyone to ensure that nothing bad has happened. Even if, hopefully, nothing bad has happened, it's very expensive to the system in terms of time and very expensive to the system in terms of cost. As such, it's critical to the maintenance of good health in this province and should be of concern to this government.

Then I hear the Minister of Health say that there's nothing to report at this time. That means to me that even though there have been serious incidents, even though this is a critical part of our health care system, the government hasn't asked any questions of AHS, hasn't sought from them any reports that explain what's happened and what they've done to resolve these issues. I do have some confidence in AHS that they are working hard to resolve it, but I would have hoped that the government was staying on top of this and seeking what those measures are that have been

brought forward by AHS to resolve these problems. I'm aghast to hear that the Minister of Health is saying that they haven't worried about it; they just left it up to AHS to deal with and hope like heck maybe something is happening, that they're not actually staying on top of their file. I'm very discouraged to hear that kind of a message back.

This is critically important. Sometimes, you know, I am discouraged to hear that the government views people who do these important pieces of the complex work of health care as somehow less than others, referring to them as not front-line workers when they seek to eliminate 11,000 of their jobs, when they send people out of the system and just keep telling us that they're not eliminating front-line jobs, when this is the kind of job that they're eliminating. This is as important as the work that doctors and nurses do. Because the doctors and nurses do their work to the absolute highest possible level of excellence, it can be completely undermined by the work of other people if they, too, are not provided the opportunity to provide work at the highest possible level.

[The Speaker in the chair]

If the doctor is an excellent surgeon but the scalpel is dirty, the patient can be lost in spite of good surgery being performed. If the nurse is an excellent practitioner but the bandages are not appropriately packaged for delivery to the nursing unit, then all that good excellence in nursing practice is lost. So I think it is important that the government stay on top of this work and that the government, when they know about – and the minister did acknowledge that indeed these instances have happened – an instance, would naturally ask for some reports.

I'm gathering from this minister that he's suggesting that there is nothing they could possibly provide to the people of Alberta to respond to this request, that there's no information that can assure them that the medical device reprocessing procedure is going ahead in the way that it needs to go ahead and that if they go in for an elective surgery, if they go in for emergency surgery, if they go in for any other issue, including our horrible current circumstances under COVID, that they will not suffer consequences related to the equipment that will be used to save their lives.

I would ask this government to reconsider their response to this motion and to show us, as they've previously been asked by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that indeed they are on top of their file, that indeed the people in the province of Alberta are safe, and that this government honours and respects the significance of the work done by people at this level of health care with regard to medical device reprocessing.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call upon the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to close debate on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be really quick. I think the minister has answered this question somewhat, that this medical device reprocessing system is suspended for now and during this said period, the requested period, May 1 to October 19. If there is nothing to report, I would appreciate it if . . .

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

## 5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

### Technology Companies

514. Mr. Bilous moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) recognize that technology companies are essential to Alberta's economic future, and (b) urge the government to support the growth of these companies by (i) immediately adopting and investing in an industry-led approach to developing and commercializing artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data science technology; (ii) ensuring province-wide access to high-speed Internet; and (iii) attracting a globally recognized technology accelerator to Alberta.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce this motion. Now, I want to start off by thanking all of the business leaders, entrepreneurs throughout Alberta who have been engaged in dialogue with me. Currently, over the last 18 months, I know that they've been engaged with the current Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. These are three different items that have been asked for by various groups throughout the province. I do want to thank them for their engagement.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that industry has been looking for support from government for quite some time. There were a number of measures that we took when we were government, and I was quite proud to initiate a number of programs that came from industry. So I'm going to spend my time talking actually breaking down this motion as to the reasons behind it and what it will do for the province if the government not only accepts this motion but puts actions, dollars, programs behind it, if it's not just lip service.

First of all, there needs to be a recognition that technology companies are essential to Alberta's economic future. Now, we know that it wasn't too long ago that the Finance minister himself said that diversification is a luxury that Alberta cannot afford. I'm happy to see that the minister has since walked back those comments. I mean, he's yet to apologize to the industry on record for making those comments to begin with, but I know that industry appreciates the fact that he's done a one-eighty when it comes to his thoughts on diversification, as has this government. I don't mean to pick on the Minister of Finance whatsoever.

You know, we had a bunch of sweeping actions when the government took office, cancelling a number of programs that were implemented by the NDP, but they weren't NDP programs. I think it's really important that we differentiate that, Mr. Speaker. They were programs that industry asked for, that, yes, the NDP implemented. But I can tell you that industry had been asking previous governments for similar programs. In fact, the best example is that in British Columbia you have to go back to 1985, when that province introduced the investor tax credit. Alberta didn't have one until 2016, when we introduced it, and then it was immediately cancelled by this government. Now, that's also part of (i), when we talk about an industry-led approach.

I'll jump back to the beginning, Mr. Speaker. First of all, technology companies are essential to Alberta. They support all of our key sectors, from oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, health sciences, life sciences. They support tourism and, of course, areas of expertise as well that Alberta has in the areas of machine learning and artificial intelligence. So those companies need the support of the government.

Again, if you look at Alberta's oil and gas sector and the reason it is so successful, it's because the government of the day many decades ago saw that there was a role for government to help derisk. Companies were going belly up trying to drill for oil, unfortunately unsuccessfully. As you know, Mr. Speaker, a costly endeavour. The government stepped in, recognized that there was a role to play, and because of the some of the supports and, obviously, our entrepreneurship and ingenuity in Alberta and our entrepreneurs we have a burgeoning oil and gas sector. Obviously, we know that this has been an extremely challenging year, but we've had decades of extreme success and wealth because government saw that there was a role.

Part of this motion, Mr. Speaker, is to urge the government to support the growth of these companies through tangible, concrete actions. This is not just lip service. It's not just taking out billboards on highways that say that we suddenly believe in diversification. It's putting meaningful action behind it.

Three parts to this motion, Mr. Speaker: one, that the government immediately adopt and invest in an industry-led approach. We say that and it's part of this motion because I'd really like to take the partisan politics out of these ideas. Again, they come from industry. They're not New Democrat, they're not UCP, they're not Wildrose, they're not Liberal, and they're not Alberta Party. They don't belong to a political party. I can tell you from speaking with industry that they are growing tired of the fact that, you know, people are trying to take ownership of one or another.

An industry-led approach means that government will listen to industry. If industry asks for an investor tax credit, you can call it whatever you want, rename it, rebrand it. I get that. But if that's what industry is saying – "Hey, this is how we can help grow our companies very quickly and provide an opportunity for everyday Albertans to participate in investing in companies in their own backyard" – then my hope is that the government will listen to that. You know, the interactive digital media tax credit; the CITC, the capital investment tax credit; and the investor tax credit all came from industry. Let's have an industry-led approach to support commercializing artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data science.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, Alberta ranks third in the world when it comes to artificial intelligence and machine learning, and that is phenomenal. We have incredible talent here in the province, and we need continued investments to continue to attract these global leaders in these areas. But I can tell you that one of the areas – I've spoken with folks, whether it's from AMII themselves or others in industry, who have said: "What we need to do is not just fund that pure research. That's critical, absolutely. We also need to ensure that there's funding to help commercialize that research." That research on its own will sit on the shelf, but it's only through commercialization that then it will become applicable; it'll solve real-world problems. Alberta has an incredible advantage. Of course, what commercialization comes down to, to speak the language of, quite frankly, everyone in this room and every Albertan, what's top of mind, is jobs. Supporting the commercialization of these ideas will in fact help support companies to grow in Alberta, to hire more people, and to become globally successful.

The second part is access to high-speed Internet. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when we were government, there were a number of grants and programs that we issued to support and increase access to Internet for communities around the province. We embarked on a strategy that we had just begun. We are now urging the government to move quickly on this. Those that are in rural and remote parts of the province need Internet. Their businesses need it to survive. If we want to again support the digitization and

technology and the growth of technology companies, people, Albertans need access to high-speed Internet.

Third is attracting a globally recognized technology accelerator to Alberta. Now, this is something that came from industry when we engaged them to write a proposal. The government has access to it. It was a proposal, that was written to me as the former minister of economic development and trade, on how to support the growth of technology and artificial intelligence – that was when we committed \$100 million – in that we need to attract a tech accelerator. We're talking about, whether it's a Techstars, a Y Combinator, one that has an international reputation. But more so, Mr. Speaker, the reason why we want to attract one is that with those accelerators come all of their connections, connections to investors, to angels, to the ecosystem that exists world-wide. Bringing it to Alberta would have tremendous success. There are a number of other jurisdictions that have in fact attracted those types of accelerators that have seen and enjoyed success.

We want to support our local companies here, and by doing all three of these initiatives or urging the government to take seriously and put real investments behind these initiatives, we will catapult Alberta on the world stage and continue to attract investment here in the province and support our local entrepreneurs and diversify our economy.

5:10

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to lend my support to private member's Motion 514. This motion is one that I hope we can all get behind as it highlights the importance of promoting Alberta's leadership in technology development and innovation. I think it's especially fitting that we're speaking to this motion today as every grade 7 to 12 student in every corner of the province is moving back to online learning.

Even before the pandemic and the recovery plan, our government was investing in postsecondary research and industry-wide development of technology. Now that we're faced with the task of recovering from the economic impacts of COVID-19, we've been ramping up investment in the technology field. In October the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation also announced a series of supports to diversify our economy through research and innovation. On top of space exploration and technology research, our government is supporting quantum technology, molecular chemistry, and geological exploration research. This government has also previously announced investment in SAIT, Red Deer College, Olds College, and the research capacity program. Alberta has world-class colleges and technical schools, and they are performing cutting-edge research in areas like 3-D printing, clean energy technology, and smart agriculture.

The minister also announced an investment in artificial intelligence to fund leading-edge research at the University of Alberta's centre for autonomous systems. As he said, Alberta is one of the top research destinations for artificial intelligence and machine learning. AI and machine learning are potentially a \$16 trillion industry. It is a no-brainer that we invested in both and in quantum computing to continue our growth as the destination for students pursuing these rapidly evolving fields. Government's focus must include postsecondary research in technology and innovation. I look at the investments Alberta's government has made so far in the students and their research, and I know that our province will be able to fulfill our potential for being leaders in this field and attract key investors and industry partners to our province.

To be honest, Mr. Speaker, the part of this motion that caught my eye and that I want to thank the member for including is section (b)(ii), "ensuring province-wide access to high-speed Internet." In a riding like mine that's mostly remote small towns and rural, I know first-hand what a limitation this can be for families. Whether it's online learning for their kids, whether you're trying to start or promote or keep a business alive, it's really crucial. I'd heard about this back from my nomination, and it continues to this day. It's the biggest thing that rural communities feel is holding themselves back.

I know that in a member's statement last week from the Member for Livingstone-Macleod he outlined pretty succinctly how he has towns that are doing so well – their home sales are through the roof; they have people wanting to flee the larger centres to come home to these smaller towns – but without not only reliable but high-quality Internet, it will be impossible for that to continue. I'm fortunate to be from a municipality that partnered with a local business about 15 years ago that did a fairly good job of building the infrastructure, getting around, and if you're fortunate to be in line of sight, not living in a coulee or a valley – I'm from a part of the world that has pretty decent Internet, and still it's tough to sometimes keep up with the Zoom calls from this job. I can't imagine running a business. So I really appreciate that that's in this motion.

According to the CRTC only 41 per cent of rural households and 31 per cent of First Nation households have access to high-speed Internet, compared to 98 per cent in urban households. In today's economy it's hard to compete in business, trade, or manufacturing without reliable access to the Internet. With poorer connections rural Albertans cannot get access to the same services as Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, et cetera. Now more than ever access to reliable Internet is essential. During this pandemic the world moved online, with online doctors' visits, online learning, and e-commerce. In a country that prides itself on tech development and innovation, why is Internet infrastructure moving this slow?

In response to the growing disparity of rural versus urban Internet, both the federal and Alberta governments took action on this issue. The federal government has introduced the universal broadband fund, a program that aims to connect at least 90 per cent of Canadians to high-speed Internet by 2021 and at least 98 per cent by 2026. To accomplish this, they're investing \$1.75 billion into the fund for Internet projects across the country.

Here at home Alberta's government announced the collaboration between the government and the tech sector to ensure that the entire province has access to stable, secure high-speed Internet, a change from the inaction of years past. The minister recently met with SpaceX and Starlink in regard to their innovative work to bring Internet to the entire planet. Our government is also investing in space exploration and technology, including support for research on radiation, enhanced GPS, and satellite technology. This is incredibly beneficial to the development of Internet connectivity for all Albertans, but it also shows our commitment to making our province a leader in technology development and innovation.

Mr. Speaker, this government agrees that technology and the companies that develop and research it are essential to Alberta's economic future. This is a field that touches all sectors of our economy, and by promoting tech and innovation, we can ensure that all sectors will grow and find new ways to create jobs. Support for these fields is not a question of supporting technology over our traditional industries; it is a question of supporting both, whether it is energy, agriculture, or finance or the countless other sectors that make up Alberta's diversified economy. Our government is supporting the growth of these sectors by recapitalizing the Alberta Enterprise Corporation by providing \$175 million to ensure the



availability of venture capital funding to technology start-ups. Through the innovation and employment grant our province is investing in the companies that will be future leaders in the tech sector, cementing our place as leaders in development and innovation.

This will be a major boost to a blooming industry that has seen success, like in Calgary where they broke the annual record for venture capital investment in tech back in August, raising \$200 million, \$64 million more than in 2019. The future of our province and economic recovery includes building up our technology research and the industries advancing because of the benefits of that research. Being a leader in the field is not just about the economy; it is about the quality of life in the province. It could be health care, agriculture, business: technology and the Internet contribute to their success, especially while we're socially distanced. We have made great strides, but there's always room for improvement, and I'm excited to see the development of technology, especially when it comes to remote Internet connectivity.

This motion is an opportunity for us to remember the success and potential our government is harnessing in our province. We should be proud of what we have accomplished and take this motion as motivation to continue building the technology and innovation industry and the infrastructure the industry needs.

I want to thank the hon. member from across the aisle for bringing Motion 514 forward, and I urge my colleagues to vote in favour of it. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the Member for Camrose.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Motion Other than a Government Motion 514, and I do echo the comments of the previous speaker from Drumheller-Stettler, who certainly goes far to seek the continuation of the acceleration of technological advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning and technologically accelerating the implementation of new ideas into Alberta industry.

But I'd like to focus even more clearly on my critic's role – and I respond in favour of this Motion Other than a Government Motion 514 – to really ensure that this House and the government of the day maintain a laser focus on the necessity to ensure that agriculture and forestry are not second cousins to oil and gas when it comes to investment in this province, investment in the future of this province. I urge the government to look for opportunities to alter policies which act as impediments to investments in agriculture and forestry that should be made in these fields to, of course, bring forward high-speed Internet right throughout the province. Access to high-speed Internet is absolutely critical. I remember writing a paper in my university days on the debate that was really quite vociferous in the province, under Premier Manning, about bringing rural electrification to the province, and it ended up in a referendum or a plebiscite, as they called it back then, and the province went forward with it.

5:20

In much the same way, Mr. Speaker, there is a huge demand and necessity for economic development that would come from having high-speed Internet available throughout the province. It's no longer a nice-to-have, future thing. We're behind on this, and we need to get it going and get it going fast because the globe, the planet, will have 9 billion people on its surface pretty soon. We have a huge opportunity to feed the demand for food as well as paper and wood products to that growing population throughout the globe.

I know there are certain things, even locally, that we can point to that are impediments to our economic development because of the, I say, overbalanced focus on oil and gas in the province. Certainly, oil and gas has to remain a focus of ours, and we wish to maintain supports for that industry – it's still our leading industry and will be for a long time – but we have to take advantage, Mr. Speaker, of the opportunities to grow our agriculture and forestry industries during a time frame when the population and the planet are still burgeoning and when the demand for products coming from both these industries will be growing along with it.

I'd like to bring forward one example, though, Mr. Speaker, which highlights the negative consequences, even locally, on a small scale of this focus on oil and gas in opposition to other investments that might be made. The example I bring to light is something that I mentioned in this House before, wherein the critic for Indigenous Relations and myself as critic for Ag and Forestry – I speak of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and myself from Edmonton-McClung – were welcomed to visit a meeting held by the individuals who are principals of a company called AER organics in Wetaskiwin. They are a company which has taken new technologies that would go beyond, let's say, hydroponics.

What they are doing is housing in sea containers contained microclimates wherein plants are vertically planted – it's vertical farming but with a highly technological focus on it – and the plants' roots receive a slightly pressurized, very fine mist of a small amount of water plus all the nutrients and fertilizer and so forth to accelerate their growth so that once they are ready to eat or transplant, they perform in such a shorter amount of time a growth profile that wouldn't have been possible outside that environment. Not only that, they're free of pests and disease and so forth.

Yet when this company, AER organics, was approached by an indigenous organization that wanted to invest in this technology and in this company and participate in the project and help to scale up the pilots and actually implement some of these sea containers and growing operations on their land and invest in it, they were told that they couldn't access the funding they wanted to because it wasn't oil and gas. In other words, the monies, the government-backed loans that the indigenous population was offered in recent time was only available for oil and gas investments and nonrenewable resources. They were at a loss. They wanted to use that funding to invest in this particular project, in this new technology in the agricultural sector, which is the company that looks to scale up and internationally market its product. They reached an impasse and were not able to access funds to proceed.

That's the type of thing that I think, Mr. Speaker, we need to focus on when the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview brings forward Motion 514, urging the government to support the growth of this type of company by eliminating the emphatic focus on oil and gas and opening up the opportunities to investors who want to look at technologies that are applicable to other industries in Alberta such as agriculture and forestry, that are much more open to do so. That focus, that restriction to only direct investment towards oil and gas enterprises in many cases, I think, is improper, and I'd really like to see the government rethink that focus. If it's not oil and gas, in many cases investors are shut out of government programs which are limited to the oil and gas sector.

Now, the agriculture and forestry industries, which I'm the critic for, are begging for high-speed Internet access and have done so for some time. The government's focus should be at a rapid pace to immediately adopt a program to implement a fast pace, an accelerated pace to get high-speed Internet to all corners of the province on, I would say, a prioritized basis. Certainly, it's not something that is a like-to-have; it's something that's a need-to-have

right away. There are not only, I mean, the direct agricultural applications but all the processing applications, the decisions by companies to locate to do secondary processing in the agricultural area, for example, or even the forestry products area, that are limited by the lack of high-speed Internet across the province. It's something that has to be attacked as a priority quickly.

We did have as a government in 2019 an AI strategy that was introduced in February of that year, and it was built around a number of pillars, you know, attracting a globally recognized tech accelerator. We had additional supports for Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute. We were helping AMII to grow AI capabilities of companies in Alberta. There were additional supports for the growth of AI companies, and we were establishing a stronger AI market presence for Alberta, and it was estimated that it would train more than 6,000 Albertans and lead to the creation of over 140 new companies. Over 30 new multinational offices and labs would have been created. These kinds of things need to be continued.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the Member for Camrose has the call.

**Ms Lovely:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Motion 514, which has been proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I want to thank the member for bringing this motion forward in this place because I think it does an important job of highlighting the need to drive investment and diversify our economy. That is exactly what the Alberta government has been doing, especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the launch of Alberta's recovery plan, a plan that puts Albertans first, prioritizes growth, and helps build and diversify our economy. In fact, our plan addresses every point that has been made in this motion.

Technology companies are essential to Alberta's economic future. As the world becomes increasingly reliant on new technologies and innovation within the technology sector, we recognize that there is a gap in the market for individuals to have an economic environment where they can innovate these new technologies.

Our government introduced the innovation employment grant, which is the most competitive incentive for investment in research and innovation across Canada. As a result, Alberta has become much more attractive for investment and innovation than B.C., Ontario, and Quebec. In 2008 the government of Alberta established the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, also known as AEC. AEC plays a crucial role in supporting technology start-ups in need of capital and as a catalyst for connecting investors, entrepreneurs as part of the Alberta venture capital ecosystem.

As part of Alberta's recovery plan, Alberta's government is investing an additional \$175 million into AEC to drive continued growth. Some might say that investing in technology isn't supporting energy, but I would argue that this is, in fact, the opposite. Supporting technology is supporting energy as the two are reliant on each other to drive economic growth and prosperity. New technologies can help to advance our energy industry in ways that we have yet to discover.

5:30

Technology is an essential part of Alberta's future. It reshapes every industry from agriculture to financial services. Mr. Speaker, this motion mentions the development and commercialization of artificial intelligence. It should be noted that artificial intelligence and machine learning are a potential \$16 trillion. That's trillion with a "t." In fact, Alberta's government is supporting the University of

Alberta in being one of the top artificial intelligence hubs in the world, which includes a recent investment of \$4.5 million in the centre for autonomous research and \$9 million for the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute. Alberta's government has also provided millions to the University of Calgary for quantum computing.

However, Mr. Speaker, one part of this motion that continuously hits close to home for me is ensuring provincial-wide high-speed Internet service. I just want to echo the comments made earlier by my friend and colleague from Drumheller-Stettler. Our boundaries butt up against one another. During the nomination and even after the election I have heard continuously from constituents that there's always a challenge about high-speed Internet service, and we need to get that fixed. It needs to be a priority for us.

The sad reality, however, is that poor Internet connections can make both work and learning from home a significant challenge. It's 2020, and our entire world is built around technology and data. How do we stop rural Alberta from falling behind? Internet connectivity is fundamental to economic development. As a businessperson I just have to say that this is something that is crucial to that industry. We want them to succeed. We need to support them.

Alberta's government is supporting expanding the Internet to all corners of the province. In fact, the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation is collaborating with the tech sector to ensure that the entire province has access to broadband and high-speed Internet. Additionally, the minister also recently met with SpaceX and Starlink about their exciting work to bring the Internet to the entire planet.

I'm glad to see that my colleagues across the aisle brought this forward because it's something that goes beyond partisanship. This is a motion that recognizes continuous work done to put Albertans first. Alberta's government will always keep the best interests of Albertans at heart. For that, I'm proud to be supporting this motion and voting in favour of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's motion put before this House to ensure that the government support the growth of technology companies, investing in and adopting an industry-led approach to developing and commercializing various forms of artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, and, of course, "ensuring province-wide access to high-speed Internet" and "attracting a globally recognized technology accelerator to Alberta."

I will begin my comments in favour of this motion, Mr. Speaker, by indicating that in the oil and gas sector, investments in technology are investments in energy development, in the energy sector in this province. In fact, oil and gas companies are looking for two things to maintain global competitiveness. They need to reduce their costs, and they need to reduce their carbon per barrel. This is how they attract capital. This is how they remain competitive. How do they do this? They do this through technology and using data and various tech applications. Sometimes this is called clean tech, but quite frankly this is an investment in the energy sector.

Similarly, with reductions to methane in response to both the provincial regulation, which led the way – and then there was a federal regulation developed after initially a great deal of leadership

at the level of the White House and even the government of Mexico undertaking a methane strategy. We have seen, of course, that federal leadership in the United States wane. It will now return. It's been a part of President-elect Biden's comments on climate change and his robust investments in climate, but, you know, the methane piece in the first instance was brought to our government as part of some of our easier to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and competitiveness that we could bring forward as part of a public policy package, that leadership.

Companies indicated to us that access to the crediting, access to capital because they were reducing their methane emissions and finding those reductions in greenhouse gas emissions was, in fact, because they were looking for ways to deploy that technology in a lower cost way. The point of the government action at, first, the voluntary and credited level and then later on at the level of regulation developments was to push that innovation and that technology, and that is why companies came to us in the first instance and said that we need a methane proposal. They were doing the same thing south of the border.

These are instances in which technology and innovation are part of the energy industry, so when I hear some of the members opposite sometimes tell themselves a little story that investment in technology is somehow diametrically opposed or different from investment in the development of the oil and gas sector, they need to be corrected in this. It is, in fact, of a piece, and our technological innovation in the energy space goes to many different applications and can then be exported around the world as well. We do indeed some even light manufacturing of these things. Not everything gets manufactured elsewhere. We do have some of that manufacturing capability here in Alberta as well in the energy space. I'm thinking, particularly, of some of the areas just outside Calgary. In that quarter between Calgary and Airdrie there are a number of these oil and gas manufacturing and technology companies working to lower costs for operators and reduce the carbon in the barrel.

Now, that is good, and what the government needs to do, then, to respond to the fact that we are an energy province in every sense of that word is to provide an innovation and technology set of policies, targeted programs, intelligent deployment of public resources to make sure that those companies can grow, that those ideas can grow into products, into applications, into jobs ultimately, Mr. Speaker.

Then it is quite distressing to see the kinds of reductions in budget as a consequence of declaring diversification a luxury we can't afford, a number of reductions in budget; for example, 125 jobs eliminated at Alberta Innovates, a number of – I believe it was some \$20 million reduced out of the budget. I'm looking at my hon. colleague. More than that, he is saying. That is unfortunate indeed and will definitely have economic multiplier effects.

I'm looking here at some of the reductions that have been made over the three-year period for the regional innovation networks. Now, I know that the regional innovation network of southern Alberta, Mr. Speaker – being a relatively new development, these regional networks respond to specific needs within those economic regions and provide some of that entrepreneurial support, that way to plug into those new, innovative ideas to make sure that folks have the ability to bring that technology into their operations.

Now, original innovation networks have been cut by, it looks to me, at least about a million dollars a year. That is unfortunate indeed given that diversification role that they play in the regions. Mr. Speaker, it is all well and good – well, in fact, we are not doing the kinds of investment attractions into Edmonton and Calgary that we should be and the diversification, the broadening of the good things of our economy: prosperity, new ideas, new sources of employment. But it is even more so important in the regions where those kinds of ways to, you know, shorten supply chains, find new

tech innovations, and be able to build one's business are even more difficult, for some sectors outside of the large regions. Reductions to those regional innovation networks are regrettable and ought to be reversed.

5:40

The other piece that is also regrettable and works against the spirit of this motion, that the government members purport to support, is the reductions to the regional economic development associations. Now, these are, in the first instance, smallish organizations whose job it is to ensure that municipalities and others are attracting investment and leveraging their strengths together.

You know, I'll just read some thoughts from Jim Willett, who's the – is he the mayor? Yes, he's the mayor of the village of Coutts. He was lamenting the reductions to the REDA SouthGrow in southern Alberta. He says: my village is a perfect example; I've got 245 people here; I'm not going to go out and hire an economic development officer; even if I collaborate with the town of Milk River with their 900 people or the village of Warner with their 300, even together we don't have the money to hire an economic development officer to follow the leads on economic development.

It's there, Mr. Speaker, that when there is not a regional approach, technology companies that are looking to expand their markets in some of the agrifood sectors that we are developing in southern Alberta will not find that way through to investing in southern Alberta.

You know, Mayor Willett goes on: I can point to the peaks-to-prairies initiative locally, the electric vehicle charging stations; I can point to over \$2 billion in investment in agrifood that we have a direct hand with putting people in touch, making things happen; you're talking about less than a million dollars for the whole province to have nine REDAs representing a vast majority of rural Alberta full-time.

Mr. Speaker, it is these kinds of very short-sighted reductions to economic development, to Alberta Innovates, to our communities that will in fact mitigate against what the government says that they support with respect to broadly shared economic development and broadly shared benefits of diversifying the economy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I also want to touch briefly on other clean technology, but I will do so at a different time. I would like to conclude my remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not very often that a motion is put forward by the Official Opposition that is supported by the majority party. However, I am happy to stand here today and provide bipartisan support for Motion 514, and I truly appreciate the constructive and thoughtful approach the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has taken in bringing this forward. Technology companies provide an innovative transition point for our province and our economy. The development and growth of our technology sector is not limited merely to one product but has the potential to impact all sectors across our province. Sharing technological innovations produced by our own technological research and development modernizes Alberta's diverse sectors and incentivizes future investment in the province.

I'm happy to see that this motion is fitting in so well with so many other elements of legislation that have been introduced by our government and legislation already in place, in fact; that is, it should be uncontroversial and apolitical to support a stronger economic future for our province. This UCP government introduced the innovation employment grant, which is the most competitive

incentive for investment in research and innovation across Canada. With it, Alberta is more attractive for investment than B.C., Ontario, and Quebec. This motion gives stronger support to legislation like the IEG as both emphasize the importance of diversifying, innovating, and advancing Alberta's technological development.

To be more specific about technological development in our province, research in artificial intelligence and machine learning has the potential to be a \$16 trillion industry, as mentioned by my colleague earlier. To explore the benefits of these developments to industry, our government is supporting the University of Alberta in being one of the top artificial intelligence hubs in the world.

I'd also like to point out that Lethbridge College has a distinct footprint in the market of technology and artificial intelligence in the gaming sector. They have a very robust program with gaming initiatives and business start-ups within the gaming community. They also have an amazing course on virtual reality. I've had the opportunity to tour that program a number of times. I even sat on an advisory board for that program for a while before taking up this position, and it is recognized as one of the top programs for virtual reality not only in Canada but all of North America. They are truly a world leader.

I recently had the opportunity to tour another development within technology innovation with the minister of agriculture through the agricultural department at the college, where they are putting this technology to use for irrigation, for maximizing the amount of irrigation potential in controlling water and evaporation, and a number of other initiatives as well as for grain storage, to monitor the storage of grain and the products that our agricultural community develop so that we can see the least spoilage and the least negative impact on the storage of those products, again, using advances in technology to monitor that. They can do that globally. It's quite incredible what they've done there at the college.

Additionally, the supports from our government come with a recent investment of \$4.5 million in the centre for autonomous research as well as \$9 million for the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute. In addition, we have also provided millions to the University of Calgary for quantum computing, although these have been mentioned by my colleagues. We're also supporting technology companies through our recapitalization of the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, which is providing \$175 million to venture capital funding for technology start-ups. Some of the greatest innovations in the world all started with a small idea. Our government strongly believes in supporting these small ideas, small beginnings because they'll become big ideas. I also believe that this motion reinforces this understanding and will help further incentivize start-up projects and independent developers to continue working on their ideas.

Technology is not just an industry unto itself, but by promoting and incentivizing technology and innovation, we can ensure that all sectors will grow and will find new ways to create jobs across Alberta. Put simply, Mr. Speaker, our government is serious about technological innovation in our province, and supporting this motion put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview allows this government to further embrace our goals and work together with the opposition members to create a stronger economic future for Alberta.

On top of the investment into the impressive work into artificial intelligence, we are also exploring more practical measures that will serve all Albertans. That is why the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation along with the Minister of Service Alberta have been working with the tech sector to ensure that the entire province has access to broadband and a high-speed Internet. These ministers'

hard work fits perfectly with this motion as it, too, calls for the province-wide access to high-speed Internet.

Mr. Speaker, serving the best interests of Albertans should always come before politics. Having bipartisan support for this motion serves to improve technological infrastructure in our province, advance our energy sector and our agricultural sector as well as many other sectors and into future projects, and to provide more reliable technology resources for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a maximum of seven minutes.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I will try to make those the most exciting seven minutes of the day. I'm sure that if I get too exciting, you'll get me back on track.

I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of this motion brought forward by my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Of course, it was my pleasure as Minister of Advanced Education under the last government to work with my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview when he was minister of economic development to produce a strategy that was supported by both of our ministries to develop the technological sector here in the province of Alberta. As Advanced Education minister my role was to provide funding to the postsecondary institutions in this province to make sure that we had an adequate number of people trained to go to work in the tech sector that we were so keen to develop because one of the things that was highlighted by the Amazon bid for its second headquarters, one of the things that Amazon highlighted when they decided not to choose Calgary was the lack of available tech expertise here in the province of Alberta.

5:50

So my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and I went to work and came up with a strategy to develop the tech workforce. Our plan was to fund 5,000 additional seats in advanced education to make sure that we had people with the requisite skills to go to work in the tech sector. A number of those were, of course, at Lethbridge College. The Member for Lethbridge-East got up and talked about those programs, but it's curious to me, Mr. Speaker, that the member failed to mention that the government scrapped the funding that we had in place for expanding those programs. I'm sure that the residents of Lethbridge-East have reminded him of that, and of course I encourage them to continue to do so. Perhaps the Member for Lethbridge-East can not only talk about the good things that Lethbridge College is doing to train people to go to work in this sector but also get the government back on track when it comes to investing and expanding the number of seats available so that we have an adequate workforce to go to work in this sector.

Now, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the workforce piece I want to spend the rest of my time on this issue of access to high-speed Internet. I appreciate the members from Drumheller-Stettler and Camrose talking about the need for access to the Internet in their ridings. I just want to remind all members of the House that it's not just rural ridings in Alberta who have issues with respect to access to the Internet, but the issues around access to the Internet in my riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar are significantly different from the issues of access to the Internet that my colleagues from Drumheller-Stettler and Camrose have. It's not the fact that there isn't fibre-optic cable that you can access; it's the fact that it's too expensive for many of the residents in my riding to tie into those cables.

I encourage all members, when the libraries are open and functioning at full capacity again, to come and visit the Capilano

branch or the Idylwyld branch of the Edmonton public library and see the number of people who are sitting at the publicly available computer workstations there and to see the lineup to access those workstations just to understand the extent of the problem of Internet access in every corner of the province, Mr. Speaker. There are many, many residents in Edmonton-Gold Bar who simply cannot afford to access the Internet from their own home. I urge the government to consider that when it's also considering how it's going to support Internet access. It's not just a matter of making sure that the infrastructure is there to access it; it's also a matter of making sure that the people have the financial ability to purchase the technology and the service so that they can access the Internet as well. It's a shame.

You know, we highlighted this issue when primary schools and secondary schools went online earlier this year. My friend from Edmonton-Glenora made the modest proposal that the government provide some additional funding to parents all across the province so that their children had access to things like laptops and other devices that they would need to access the Internet so that they could participate in online classes. The government shot that down, which was incredibly disturbing and also a bit surprising, Mr. Speaker, considering that their ideological fellow-travellers in the Ontario provincial government saw fit to provide a modest financial stipend to families in that province when it came to providing the tools required to access the Internet.

You know, here we are again. All members have highlighted the fact that secondary schools now are entirely online, but they have not mentioned what, if anything, they're going to do to make sure that the students in my constituency and every constituency across Alberta have the requisite tools they need to access online learning, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close debate on Motion 514.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and close debate. I want to start off by thanking all members of the Assembly, including government members who have spoken in support of this motion, for their bipartisan support.

I do want to clarify just a couple of points with this, Mr. Speaker. The intention behind this motion to urge the government to make these investments and commitments is because the government is currently not doing that. If the government were investing in high-speed Internet meaningfully, if it was supporting the commercialization of artificial intelligence and machine learning, again, significantly, then I don't think there'd be a need for this. The fact of the matter is that, to my knowledge, the government has not been working to attract a global technology accelerator.

What I want to say – and I appreciate that the current Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has, you know, this year committed \$9 million to AMII, the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute, but I want to remind members of this Chamber that the current

government has made significant cuts to our postsecondaries. In fact, this year alone the University of Alberta has been cut \$110 million in one year. Making massive cuts to education, cuts to health care, cuts to our K to 12 system makes Alberta less attractive to companies, to investors that are looking for a quality of life that Alberta has the potential to offer, Mr. Speaker.

You know, in this, when we're talking about making significant investments, in February 2019 the former Premier and I made an announcement of \$100 million to artificial intelligence for over a five-year period. That, Mr. Speaker, put a stake in the ground and put a signal to everyone globally that Alberta was serious about the role of artificial intelligence and machine learning.

I appreciate that members opposite have talked about the fact that it's a \$16 trillion industry. Absolutely, it is. Alberta is in a position to capitalize on this. We have incredible expertise, not just in Edmonton; in Calgary, in Lethbridge, in other parts of the province, but it will take a significant investment. I'm not trying to diminish efforts that this current government has made, but handing \$4 million or \$5 million here and a couple of million dollars there is not the investment that we need to be globally competitive. The world is competing against each other, and right now we're not ahead of Toronto, Waterloo, or Montreal, Mila, or Vector. We are not. Dollar for dollar, pound for pound we're not, but we have the opportunity.

The purpose behind this motion is to recognize. I do appreciate members of all sides saying: here is an opportunity to invest significantly in advancing our technology companies to continue to be globally competitive. Now, we know that despite the fact that the government has made cuts to a variety of organizations and entities and programs that were designed to support these very entrepreneurs to grow in scale, there's still an opportunity. There's an opportunity to significantly invest in high-speed Internet so that the next Google could be a young person sitting somewhere in a rural community or in an indigenous community somewhere that just needs access to the Internet in order to take their idea and turn it into a viable company. I appreciate members advocating for that.

Again, the accelerator, a globally renowned tech accelerator: we're talking about attracting the best to the province. When I say "the best," we're talking about supports for our entrepreneurs. We're giving them the best when it comes to connections, opportunities, investors, access to expertise, and, again, this is something that the private sector asked for. This isn't something that we thought of somewhere. Of course, looking at the strengths that AMII has, AMII recognizes that there's more work to be done in commercializing their ideas, but that's where support from government could really help propel this industry forward.

You know, with this, Mr. Speaker, I do want to thank all members and urge all members to support this motion and truly make Alberta an incredibly diverse province.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 514 carried]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]



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