



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 2, 2020

Day 75

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 2, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Members' Statements

Spinal Muscular Atrophy Treatment Coverage

Mr. Loewen: I want to introduce to the House today Mighty Max. Max is just under two years old and lives with his parents, Bryarly and Bowden, in Fairview. Max's mom experienced complications during her pregnancy, with over four weeks' bedrest. On January 11, 2019, at barely 25 weeks, she was rushed to the Fairview hospital. Bryarly delivered Max, with the NICU air ambulance landing only minutes before his arrival to intubate him and fly him to Edmonton, where he would spend the next 91 days fighting for his life. Born weighing only 1 pound 11 ounces, Max had numerous medical complications caused by his prematurity, but he fought through.

He was developing well, but at 12 months his parents noticed that he stopped bearing weight on his legs, collapsed when put at his table, and arched his back when holding his hands to walk. Recent genetic test results show a rare disease called spinal muscular atrophy, or SMA. Remarkably, this condition has nothing to do with his prematurity. SMA leads to a progressive loss of muscle strength that affects the ability to walk, swallow, and breathe.

Spinraza, a prescription drug, can increase survival and motor function, but Max's best chance at being able to walk and live a healthy life depends on receiving a dose of Zolgensma, a one-time, potentially life-changing treatment that is not yet approved or funded by Health Canada. It costs \$2.8 million and replaces the faulty gene at the root of the disease. It is the most expensive one-time-dose therapy in the world and must be given prior to Max turning two, somewhere between his actual birthday in January 2021 and his due date at the beginning of May. When I first Facebook posted about Mighty Max and the GoFundMe page to raise money for treatment, the Health minister's office immediately reached out to me and said that they were aware of the situation and are hopeful for solutions. That was a great relief to me, and I have to thank the Minister of Health for knowing about the situation with Zolgensma and caring enough to reach out.

Max is a fighter, a survivor, and a mighty boy surrounded by a loving family and a community who will move mountains to give him the best chance of being able to walk and live a healthy, long life. Let's do what we can for Mighty Max.

The Speaker: I might just remind the member that no matter how noble the cause, the use of a prop would still not be appropriate. It certainly looked like that may have happened.

COVID-19 and Health Care Workers

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the dedicated and life-saving work we see day after day from our front-line health care heroes. I cannot imagine the stress and pressure they feel. While Albertans see our health heroes working themselves to the bone to save lives and protect this province, they also see that the UCP government has failed to stand with them and provide them the support they need. In Calgary all four major hospitals are under outbreak status, and tragically lives have been lost to these outbreaks. AHS has told Calgary hospitals to ration oxygen, and

day after day I hear from doctors and nurses and other front-line staff about the daily struggles they face.

This government has refused to step up and give these heroes the support they need and deserve. The Finance minister, who thinks that nurses are a drain on the economy, is content to leave \$300 million sitting on the table that should be going to our health workers. The Health minister, a Calgary MLA, has made clear his scorn for the lifesavers in our hospitals, both with his personal activities and with his plan to fire 11,000 health care workers. The Premier, who abdicated his responsibilities for 12 days, has made it clear that he won't take the simple, basic step of a mask mandate because he cares more about the opinion of his antimasker MLAs than the well-being of our medical workers.

Calgary will get through these tough times, Mr. Speaker, and I know that our health heroes will rise to conquer this challenge. Now, the UCP and this cabinet have a simple choice before them. They can step up and give our health workers the support they need, or they can continue to stand on the sidelines and throw stones at those saving lives and fighting the spread. Albertans are watching. What will the UCP choose?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Human Rights Day and COVID-19 Response

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On December 10, 1948, Canada signed the universal declaration of human rights, or UDHR, along with other member countries of the United Nations. With the conclusion of World War II, it was imperative that the nations of the world come together and actively speak for the rights inherent to all people. UDHR is more than just a list of freedoms. It is a milestone document that proclaims the inalienable rights which everyone is entitled to as a human being. Since 2013, with the participation of Canadians for a Civil Society, the Alberta Legislature has recognized international Human Rights Day in the Legislature.

This year's Human Rights Day theme follows the COVID-19 pandemic and focuses on the need to ensure human rights are essential to recovery efforts. Platforms such as Alberta's recovery plan provide an example of our province's basic human rights through a comprehensive framework that helps Albertans weather the COVID-19 storm. To paraphrase article 25, section 1, of the UDHR, everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and of their family. This includes food, clothing, housing, and medical care as well as the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, or other circumstances beyond their control.

Through Alberta's recovery plan the government has provided millions of dollars to our health care system to support front-line workers and continue high-quality patient care through these demanding times. The government has also provided targeted investment into our economy to create more jobs for Albertans to reach the standard of living that supports their families. We have also provided supports and funding for food banks and various shelters. These are just three specific examples of the many ways our government is advancing human rights in Alberta.

Our government has acknowledged that the recovery plan is a work-in-progress. Human rights is also a work-in-progress. As we work to bring our province, our country, and our world through the COVID storm, we must work to come through stronger and freer than we were before.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

COVID-19 Statistics and Health System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For months this Premier withheld crucial modelling of the COVID-19 pandemic from Albertans. “No, we do not have updated models,” he said in this very place. Today Albertans know that this UCP government was lying to them.

We released current AHS modelling of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our hospital system, and the numbers are alarming. In the next two weeks as many as 775 Albertans will be in the hospital with a severe case of COVID-19, and as many as 161 will need intensive care. Our hospitals are already overcrowded, our health care heroes already worked to exhaustion, in major Calgary hospitals we are struggling to deliver enough oxygen to patients, and more than a thousand Albertans are infected with COVID-19 every day.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta was not plunged into this crisis overnight. The danger grew over a number of weeks and months. Every Albertan knew that our daily case numbers were rising steadily. On Labour Day there were 157 new cases. In the last week we’ve seen days with more than 1,700. The Premier knew that these soaring case numbers would put a dangerous strain on our hospitals. He knew because he had AHS modelling all along even though he refused to show it to Albertans or even acknowledge that it existed. He knew that if Albertans saw what was coming, they would have demanded real action. Instead, this Premier hid the information from Albertans and then went into hiding himself, 12 days out of sight, while dozens of Albertans died and thousands more were infected.

AHS modelling showed that the crisis was coming, but the Premier did nothing. Maybe he refused to believe the evidence, maybe he just froze, or maybe he calculated that the political cost of alienating the extremist fringe of his own caucus and his party was greater than the human cost of letting COVID-19 spread out of control in Alberta. We may never know, but we know that Albertans are paying the price.

Speaker’s Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: I might just say that over the last couple of weeks I have made significant comment around the use of the word “lying.” While I’ve said that provided we’re not speaking about individuals, it is permissible but perhaps not profitable. If this type of language persists from both sides of the House, the Speaker may take additional steps to ban the use of such words. This is certainly my strongest statement on the use of this type of unparliamentary language. I hope that we can heed the advice and not take additional steps that would require a more interventionist approach from the Speaker.

The hon. the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

1:40 Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Region

Mr. Yao: As someone grateful for the opportunities and all the ways that we are enriched by where we live, I am excited to introduce our region’s new identity and destination name, Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo. By combining our urban and rural strengths, this name represents the unity of the region. Fort McMurray is a name recognized around the world, and Wood Buffalo holds the cultural, historical, touristic, and economic assets of the region. The Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo identity reveals our distinct character, a sense of place, an authentic value promise to the world in a unified voice.

As a region we are naturally blessed, but our greatest strengths are our incredible economic opportunities, innovation, remarkable indigenous strength, diversity, communities built for families, natural wonder, and community spirit. Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo is an economic engine of Canada that contributes meaningfully to the lives of all Canadians across the nation. Our culture of innovation has solved problems, transformed industries, and introduced new technologies to the world.

Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo includes six First Nations, five Métis local councils, one Métis community association, and 10 communities that call northeast Alberta home. The region’s strong Cree, Dene, and Métis communities are rich in collaborative spirit and historical, cultural, and economic importance. In Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo you’ll find a diversity of culture, ethnicity, and language that you’d only expect in the world’s largest cities. Our communities are designed around family life, offering everything from abundant playgrounds to endless nature trails to North America’s largest recreational centre. Our region is one of the best places to take in the majestic northern lights, and our backyard is Canada’s largest national park.

Like so much else in Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo, our community spirit is hard to put into words. It’s one of those things you need to feel to understand. Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo is a place like no other. Everyone who calls it home will tell you just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, on what I believe is an auspicious day for the member.

School Re-entry Plan

Mr. Carson: There was a question on the mind of every single Albertan over the summer: what on earth was this UCP government doing to get schools ready for the second wave of this pandemic? This Premier had a lot of fancy rhetoric and made some big, big promises. Alberta’s schools were going to be the safest in the country, he said. He boasted that we would be the best in class. Don’t worry, the Premier told Albertans. He had a plan, the best plan. It was bulletproof.

Well, now we know that that school plan wasn’t worth the paper it was written on, and Alberta families are paying the price. Right now 207 schools are formally in official outbreak status. Absolutely devastating, Mr. Speaker. Parents are scared, teachers are at their breaking point, and kids are stressed out.

But it didn’t have to be this way. If this government took the time to properly prepare over the summer for the second wave of this pandemic, we wouldn’t be sending kids home right now and closing schools. Closing schools this winter and into next year wasn’t what the Premier promised Albertans.

Now this government is stuck in neutral, with no vision for schools, as events pass them by. They have no plan for the second wave, and you can see it at every juncture. For example, take teachers, many of whom who are also parents of school-aged kids. This Minister of Education is now forcing them to work from school to deliver digital learning while forcing their kids to learn from home. How can teachers be in two places at once, Mr. Speaker?

When you ask this government, they’re like a deer caught in the headlights. They freeze. They have no answers. They have nothing reasonable to say. Why don’t they have any answers? Because they have no real working plan for schools. It didn’t have to be this way, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve better.

The Speaker: The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a statement to make.

Edmonton Air Tour

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer was not typical for gatherings or parades, and while we all know the reason why, the silver lining of this cloud was that I've seen Albertans get very creative while they maintain compliance and embrace the freedoms that we have here in Alberta compared to other provinces. I was happy to be part of a planning team for the first-ever COVID-19 Edmonton-wide air tour, and I was able to fly my airplane in it with a passenger as well.

You see, Mr. Speaker, we arranged for 29 planes from across the province that were representative of general aviation. They were all hand-picked. We could fly into and drop in and promote local airports, the aviation community, and give back to them. It was a huge success. We flew from Villeneuve to Drayton Valley and overtop of Wetaskiwin, stopping at Camrose, on into Josephburg, over to Westlock, Barrhead, Mayerthorpe, and then back to Villeneuve. The crowds may have been of different sizes at different locations, but I'll tell you what. The enthusiasm shown by the crowds, the local chambers of commerce, the municipal officials, the church groups, the not-for-profit organizations, and the MLAs was simply outstanding. One pilot was even brought to tears. No, it wasn't me although I have to admit that I did get a little choked up when we rolled into Drayton Valley.

The secret to the success of this event was to have the local folks show off why their area was the best place to visit and to ensure that the pilots would come back. Their hospitality was second to none. As pilots it was our job to bring our passion for flight and talk about the airplanes and let people know how they could learn how to fly themselves. As a pilot I was absolutely overwhelmed by the welcome and the joy that were brought to those little airports that day. As a politician I was again thoroughly impressed by what character Albertans have.

We'll continue to make this an annual event, and – stay tuned – we're probably going to expand it to the rest of the province. We'll continue to support each other. We will be inspired by each other, and that event proved to me that better days are ahead for us all. To all Albertans: stay strong and free.

Bill 47 and Workers' Compensation

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to mince words today. Bill 47 is not about balance; it's about choking workers with red tape in the middle of a pandemic while case counts are climbing, as ICUs have exceeded critical capacity, and as unemployment levels are consistently in double digits.

Just how bad is it? That worker that was injured on the work site, whose wife was an educational assistant fired by the UCP, will immediately lose his health benefits, benefits that he needs to pay for life-saving medication for his daughter, the braces for his son, and the physiotherapy for his wife. All of that: gone. Also, that injured worker will no longer be entitled to 90 per cent of his lost wages. How much will be covered? My guess is whatever level is most likely to guarantee surpluses that the UCP wants to return to employers. Yup, you heard that right: give workers less so employers can pay less.

However, it gets worse. Injured workers will also risk being fired if they make a claim. So he has a choice: make the claim, risking his job altogether; risk losing his health benefits; or work through the injury and risk permanent disability. And we know how this government feels about the supports for disabled Albertans.

What if the worker was a nurse, a nurse who has been working for months to save our loved ones, who has watched more people die in the past few months than he has seen in the past few years, who was part of the decision-making process to triage admissions because this government failed to take action, and who decided who lives and who dies? Because this government took away the presumption that his PTSD is a result of work, he has to prove it, fight for the coverage, and relive that trauma over and over again instead of just focusing on his recovery.

Mr. Speaker, if it wasn't clear before, there should be no doubt now. This UCP government will do anything and everything to make life harder for Albertans that aren't their rich buddies with deep pockets.

Government and Official Opposition Policies

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, the role of the Official Opposition in a parliamentary democracy isn't that complicated: scrutinize the policies of the government and develop alternatives for consideration. It's unfortunate that this NDP opposition spends more of its time trolling on Twitter than doing any of those things I just mentioned. Just like when they were in government, they don't want to do the hard work. Day after day they come into this Chamber, yell and scream and spread blatant misinformation, and have yet to offer a single policy alternative beyond "lock it all down." You don't have to be a sports coach to figure out that their playbook is just one page: spread fear and misinformation to try and divide Albertans at one of the most difficult times in our province's history.

But Albertans are stronger than that, and across all of this province people are coming together in a historic way to protect lives and livelihoods and to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The new public health measures announced last week strike a strong and correct balance, and Albertans are motivated more than ever to bend the curve, protect the health care system, and support the economy. Despite the unprecedented challenges we face, our people are still hard at work, with five straight months of job growth and record-setting levels of venture capital investment.

The entrepreneurial spirit of our people is a bull in the chute, ready to take off, but this doesn't come as a surprise to those of us on this side of the aisle. This is what our province has always done. Throughout the Great Depression and world wars, throughout recessions and economic downturns, throughout the history of our province our people are at their best when times are at their worst. This is something the NDP just doesn't understand. They didn't understand it when they were in government, and they don't understand it now. Albertans unite when times are tough, and anyone who tries to divide them is on a fool's errand.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Protective Measures

Ms Notley: Sixteen thousand Albertans are sick. Yesterday hospitalizations rose by 10 per cent in just one day; almost 100 people in the ICU. Now, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's own models show that two weeks from now things will get worse. Now, there are two ways to fight this pandemic. You can act to stop the spread, preventing illness and preventing death, or you can simply accept it, accept that loss of life and excessive illness are necessary collateral damage, and plan to stretch the health system to the

breaking point in the process. Premier, why are you only focused on the latter?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me say that on behalf of all members we're sorry to learn of the positive test of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. We wish him all the best and, hopefully, a speedy recovery.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has just a week ago imposed extraordinary restrictions in a strong and balanced way that seek to bend down the curve with the co-operation of Albertans while minimizing broader damage to our society. To this day, in the last nine months the NDP seems not to have accepted the opioid crisis, the mental health crisis, the economic crisis, the multiple crises that we are handling.

Ms Notley: Their actions, Mr. Speaker, have been anything but extraordinary. We are the only province without a mask mandate. The Premier looked the other way when hundreds of people gathered without masks. The laws against outdoor gatherings are written like Swiss cheese. What few laws we do have he's enforcing at less than 10 per cent the rate of our neighbours. We have the highest number of cases in the country, yet people here can still meet up at the bar after work and go play the slots. Again, why won't this Premier act to prevent the spread of this virus?

Mr. Kenney: Not only is the NDP leader addicted to dividing Albertans, but unfortunately she's now spreading disinformation about the public health restrictions. No, Mr. Speaker, Albertans cannot get together after work at the pub unless the person they work with is a member of their immediate household. This is a very good example. If the member is actually concerned about compliance with the public health restrictions and limiting the spread, why is she inviting people to go out there and break the rules by socializing when it is not permitted?

Ms Notley: Single people can meet up with two other single people in a restaurant. Read your own laws, for heaven's sake. Learn what it is you're not protecting people from.

Now, forcing our health care system to be the last and only line of defence will fail. Right now beds are being closed because of staff shortages. Patients are double-booked in both the ER and the ICU. They're so overwhelmed that backup doctors who don't work in ICU are being called in, some doing their first shift in ICU since their residency. Premier, what needs to happen for you to actually act to prevent the spread, not manage it but prevent it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, even jurisdictions with total lockdowns and shelter-in-place, stay-at-home orders allow individuals who live alone to have one or two close contacts as visitors. Why? Because we're also concerned about the mental and emotional health of Albertans. What we just heard from them is that they want to throw people into isolation. They want a stay-at-home, lockdown quarantine. From day one they've been itching to use maximum state power to trample on Charter rights, with collateral damage being the emotional and the mental health of Albertans, and they're wrong.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

Ms Notley: What those workers can do, those individual Albertans, under this Premier's watch is go meet in the bar and have some drinks till 11 o'clock at night. That's not happening in any other part of the country with numbers anywhere close to this, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 47

Ms Notley: Now, speaking of workers, we owe our gratitude to workers in health care, workers on the front line, yet the Premier is thanking them by attacking the laws that keep them safe and slashing the compensation they'll receive when these laws inevitably fail. Why, Premier, is the right to refuse unsafe work on the chopping block in the middle of a pandemic?

Mr. Kenney: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the province of British Columbia has positivity rates similar to those of Alberta. Of course, they have fewer reported active cases because their testing is substantially lower than ours. They as well have almost identical rules with respect to the hospitality business. I know the NDP hates the restaurant business. They made that plainly evident in killing hundreds of those mom-and-pop businesses and creating thousands of layoffs when they were in office. But we are doing everything we can to bend down the curve while preventing – she wants to put 175,000 of those workers into poverty and unemployment. We don't.

Ms Notley: What we want is to keep those workers safe, and I wish that the Premier agreed. Instead, we know that thousands of workers have already been forced to rely on WCB because they contracted COVID-19 in their workplace. How does this government respond? The Premier is removing guaranteed 90 per cent net coverage of lost wages under WCB, a rate that's been in place for over a century. Why at a time when injured workers and their families need help the most are you acting to take even more away from them?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. Under the proposed amendments injured workers will be compensated at 90 per cent of their net earnings up to the maximum insurable earnings amount. The WCB will continue to review and set the maximum amount based on ensuring that 90 per cent of workers in the province would have full wage coverage. The maximum amount was not legislated. Everything she just said: completely, categorically false.

Ms Notley: I would suggest the Premier read the bill, not his badly written speaking notes.

But there's more. They want to remove the ability for front-line health care workers to claim presumptive PTSD coverage if they experience a traumatic event in the workplace. Today I think of the doctors, the nurses, and other front-line workers who are under extreme stress, seeing Albertans at their most sick, making life-and-death triage decisions, risking their own lives every day at work. How can the Premier turn to those workers, some people who've seen more trauma in the last month than he will in a whole lifetime, and say, "Prove it"?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, all Albertans and this government are deeply grateful for the front-line health care workers, especially those in our 17 major urban hospitals, that are operating under increasing stress, which is why we are surging additional hires and providing additional support, just as we did through the wage top-up for health care aides in long-term care facilities. The leader's characterization of the proposed amendments to the labour code are completely false.

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

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, we're in the midst of a health care crisis unlike anything we've seen before, but in one of the most heartless

decisions that I've seen in this Assembly, the UCP is taking away health benefit coverage for injured workers. Benefits ensure that a worker can take care of their family during a pandemic. They ensure that the family can afford that \$200-a-month asthma inhaler for their daughter. Why did the government do this? To create balance. To the minister of labour: how is it balanced to punish the families of injured workers during a pandemic?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. We're continuing to make sure that we have the right protocols in place, the right laws in place. We're rebalancing our labour laws in this province, and we're proud of the work that our minister of labour is doing to make sure we have that right balance, to make sure we can get people working in our economy. We have to make sure we're there for the employers and job creators as well. We're bringing balance back to the workforce.

Ms Gray: They are taking away health benefits during a pandemic. In a time when workers across the province, particularly essential front-line health care workers, are facing daily risk of exposure to COVID-19, the government is also going to limit the definition of an occupational disease and remove the Occupational Health and Safety Council. At a time when workers are facing a disease they wouldn't normally encounter in the workplace, the UCP is making it harder for workers to make a claim for a disease related to their work. To the same minister: will you explain to essential workers why you're making it harder for them to have access to coverage during a health crisis that is impacting every workplace?

Mr. Kenney: Well, that's simply not true, Mr. Speaker. If a worker requires health or medical benefits under the proposed amendments related to a workplace injury or illness, the worker will continue to receive workers' compensation medical benefits. I repeat: the worker will continue to receive WCB medical benefits.

Ms Gray: They're making it harder to be approved to receive benefits.

Now, in another move to roll back progress in this province by decades, the UCP has removed the employer's duty to reinstate a worker when they return from an injury. Workers can now be fired after making a WCB claim, again, in the middle of a pandemic. Our province has the second-highest unemployment in Canada, and the UCP is forcing workers to work when injured because they might be too afraid to make a claim. At the same time the government is telling sick workers to stay home. To the minister: while you're piling so much hardship and suffering onto working Albertans, have you considered that we're in a global pandemic?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Again, Mr. Speaker, completely false. In fact, the opposite is true. Under the proposed amendments employers and workers can and should work together to address potentially dangerous conditions before they reach the point of refusal. Workers have the same rights – the same rights – and protections related to dangerous-work refusals as they've had in the past. The process for dealing with dangerous-work refusals is simpler, streamlined, and easier to follow for employers and workers to ensure that these issues are resolved quickly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-City Centre has a question.

COVID-19 Statistics and Health System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our dedicated hospital staff are overwhelmed. Due to this government's failure to plan and

prepare for the second wave, our front-line health care heroes are coping with profound physical and emotional stress as they try to hold back a pandemic. Because of this government's failures, they're even being told to ration oxygen. Now, while I'm expecting to hear the same tired message, let's hope for once that maybe he can give our health care heroes a straight answer. Premier, why have you not acted to help our front-line health care workers cope with this second wave?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. We were preparing for the second wave, actually, back in March. We knew there was going to be a second wave in the fall. Again, the member is fearmongering about oxygen and being, quite frankly – well, no. Sorry. The NDP – I will try my best to be parliamentary, but with that type of language, it's hard not to call it for what it is and not use the L-word. But, look, the Calgary zone has an adequate supply of . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Shandro: . . . oxygen, Mr. Speaker, to meet the patient needs now and in the days ahead. They continue to provide safe and appropriate care for all patients, including those who are in need of oxygen therapy. What he said is . . .

The Speaker: At 2:02 a point of order is noted.

Mr. Shepherd: If this is preparation, Mr. Speaker, I can't imagine what we would have had otherwise.

The Premier acts like the impact of the second wave is inevitable and that this government has done everything they could have to prevent it, everything except a mask mandate or even enforcing his own public health orders. This Premier's pandemic response has been all talk and no substance. When there's a tough decision, the Premier hides, and our health care heroes are left to cope with the impact. This Premier's half measures aren't working. His own modelling shows that. Front-line health care workers need real support, real action. When will they see it from this government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, \$2 billion in additional funding for the health system: that is action. Only the NDP would see it otherwise. Secondly, there is not modelling; there are two-week projections that the AHS has for any critical disease of this nature. Thirdly, hiding from difficult decisions? A week ago I stood in front of Albertans and outlined the most stringent public health restrictions in the history of our province, balanced and strong restrictions. But, no, we won't put hundreds of thousands of people out of work, as the NDP wants.

Mr. Shepherd: "I'll do my best, but, it should never have come to this." That's Dr. Rhonda Ness, who this week went to work as a backup ICU doctor, something she hasn't done since her residency. Day after day I hear heart-wrenching stories from our front-line health workers about how they're going above and beyond to protect lives and livelihoods. Now, I am confident that these health care heroes in our system will rise to the challenge, like they always have, but they deserve real support from this government, something that's been lacking from day one. What new supports will the Premier actually announce this afternoon to help our health care heroes?

Mr. Kenney: Again, Mr. Speaker: \$2 billion. We have increased the Health budget by 10 per cent this year to provide our health care workers and hospitals with every support that they need in addition to \$270 million for long-term care and nursing homes, in addition

to \$100 million additionally for mental health support, more than all of the other provinces combined, in addition to hundreds of millions of dollars for nonprofits and community organizations to work with the most vulnerable, an unprecedented series of actions.

Federal Fiscal Stabilization Program

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, two days ago, along with their fiscal update, the federal government released changes to the fiscal stabilization program. After decades of contributions by Alberta to the rest of Confederation amounting to more than \$630 billion net, Ottawa has once more failed Albertans with this almost token measure that does not address the underlying unfairness of the current system. As a result, Alberta is losing out on nearly \$4.6 billion, dollars that Albertans have paid for many times over and dollars that we need to help address our current economic challenges. To the Premier: what is your reaction to these changes?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is deeply disappointed with the announcement about only modest changes to the fiscal stabilization program. All 13 provinces and territories had called for the federal government to create fiscal fairness, recognizing the oversized role that Alberta has played in the prosperity of the federation, yet we got 10 per cent of the ask that was not just made by Alberta but by every province and territory, shortchanged by \$4.6 billion for the province that's done the heavy lifting in the history of the federation. This is a slap in the face for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Premier for his response. Given that Alberta asked for the cap to be removed and given that Alberta will now only receive roughly \$750 million of the estimated \$3 billion that Alberta would have been eligible for without this unfair and arbitrary cap, to the Premier: what message will Alberta send to Ottawa on why the full elimination of the cap is necessary to address our concerns and properly reciprocate Alberta's long-standing outsized contributions to Confederation?

Mr. Kenney: I thank the Member for Calgary-South East for his question. He's right: \$3 billion shortchanged for this fiscal year. But, Mr. Speaker, the unanimous request of provinces and territories was for a retroactive lifting of the cap to 2015 to recognize the crash in revenues then, so we have been shortchanged by \$4.6 billion. Let's be clear. This is not Albertans getting out a begging bowl. We don't look for welfare as a province; we look for fairness. That is money that we have put into the rest of the federation: \$600 billion in net contributions over the past six decades.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that up until 2020 Alberta has been a net contributor to the federation for every year that equalization has existed and given that even through these challenging times our province has faced since 2015, we have still been net contributors in excess of \$15 billion a year and given that Alberta is now facing the most challenging economic circumstances that we have seen since the Great Depression, can the Premier explain to Albertans why it is necessary for Ottawa not only to remove the cap but also to make retroactive fiscal stabilization payments to correct for the unfairness of recent years?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's necessary because a strong Canada needs a strong Alberta. As I've said before, imagine if we saw a

fiscal and economic meltdown in the auto sector impacting Ontario, in the aviation sector in Quebec. You know that the national media would focus on that as story number one, and the government of Canada would be all over it. Yet this province, that has done so much, this province – look at these flags of all the other provinces and territories. Think about the hundreds of thousands of Albertans from across the country. This Canadian province deserves for Canada to have its back, just as we've helped our fellow Canadians for six decades.

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

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to see that the UCP government implemented one of the NDP's small-business supports by expanding the relaunch grant, but this is not enough. Small businesses, especially those in the hospitality sector, can't make a buck under these new restrictions. Restaurant owner Paul Shufelt said: I still have to pay staff; I still have to keep the lights on; I still have to keep the gas going. To the jobs minister. The extra \$5,000 will not be enough. We've called on your government to reinstate the deferral on utility payments. Will you commit here and now to a utility deferral to help save small businesses from going under, and if not, why not?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let's get this clear. The NDP says that some businesses cannot break even with these restrictions. What does the NDP want to do? Shut them down completely. His leader just spent minutes in this place demanding that they all be completely suspended. Every group representing Alberta job creators has thanked this government for taking a balanced approach, and if the NDP were making the decisions, hundreds of thousands of people would be put out of work, and 40 per cent of small businesses would risk never reopening again.

Mr. Bilous: With respect, that's patently false.

Given that mounting debt is plaguing Alberta small businesses and that over half of small businesses have reported they're using personal finances or high-interest sources of credit to keep them afloat and given that these Alberta businesses have exhausted all of their options for low-interest loans, including what's listed on Biz Connect, given that we proposed a \$30,000 low-interest line of credit backed by the provincial government because we believe that Alberta entrepreneurs are the backbone of the economy, will you step up to the plate, adopt our call for a \$30,000 low-interest loan, and ensure that Alberta's small businesses can stay afloat?

2:10

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you to the member for the question. We also want to thank all the small-business owners across Alberta for all the hard work that they've been doing throughout this pandemic, all the steps that they've done in real time to comply with the health orders. To the Premier's point earlier on, the members opposite want to shut these small businesses down. We're putting in place tactical measures to bend the curve so that they can stay open. We've put in place a second tranche of the relaunch grant to help support small businesses. If these measures continue, we'll look at other ways to support them. We're working with the federal government on new initiatives. They announced that federally. We're going to continue to partner with the federal government to support our small businesses.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that rent relief is the number one requested support from small and medium-sized businesses as they try to survive this pandemic and given that rent is the largest fixed

cost facing small businesses in the province and given that bar owners, restaurateurs, and hard-hit small businesses cannot access the maximum amount of the new federal rent subsidy, to the minister. Alberta's entrepreneurs need you to move at the speed of business. Enough with the rhetoric. It's time for action. Will your government provide supplemental provincial rent relief and save Alberta businesses? Yes or no?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it's a bit rich for the NDP, on one side, saying that they'd shut down small businesses and, on the other side, saying that they want to open them up. I know it's a bit lonely over there as the sole member of the capitalist caucus of the NDP, and he's advocating for small businesses, but we're going to do everything that we can to support the small businesses across Alberta. We've been there with the second tranche of the relaunch grant. We were there earlier on with the commercial rent relief. We're going to continue to work with the federal government. We're seeking details from the federal government on the new initiatives that they've recently launched to make sure that they work for small businesses here in our province.

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

School Re-entry Plan and Student Achievement

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two new studies from the University of Alberta have provided an early warning that student learning is suffering significantly during COVID-19. Students in grades 2 and 3 scored consistently lower on reading skills than previous students. Researchers say that moving kids online and reducing face-to-face interactions is part of the problem. Because the government failed to keep schools safe, hundreds of thousands of grade 7 through 12 students have been forced out of their classrooms. To the Minister of Education: why did you fail to provide schools with a safe and lasting re-entry plan?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I do want to thank the member for the important question. I know that the Minister of Education has worked incredibly hard on our safe restart plan, that has largely worked very well. This plan was developed in partnership with school divisions and education partners right across this province. The focus is really on keeping kids safely in school. K to 6 students will remain in classes for in-person learning as well as other students with unique and additional needs. This is something that the Minister of Education takes very seriously, the mental health and well-being of students, and continues to work with partners on that.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister's plan has objectively failed and given that this new Alberta research indicates that these students are roughly six to eight months behind where they should be and given that the researchers also note that this problem can be reversed if it is done so immediately – but this requires physical distancing and more staff to get kids into schools safely – and given that the Education minister failed to deliver on her promise to bring students back safely to school this fall, this time the minister has a choice. Will she put kids before her \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway? Yes or no?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do understand that the article that the member opposite is referencing primarily does speak to those in grades K to 6, elementary school students,

and that is why it is so important to make sure that those kids can stay in class. We continue to work as a government along with education partners and the chief medical officer of health so that we can keep kids safely in school, reduce community transmission of COVID, and make sure that our youngest citizens have access to high-quality education. I do want to thank all of the educators and administrators right across this province, who have been doing an exceptional job over the last seven or eight months.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the researchers say that school closures in the spring were likely unavoidable as it was the first wave of COVID-19 in Alberta but given that it's December now and there's no excuse for the minister to fail to provide for a re-entry plan for January that keeps kids safe in schools and learning in person, will the Minister of Education learn from her failure and read our Safe Schools, Successful Students report, that we gave her last July, and cap class sizes at 15 to keep students in their classrooms as safe as possible? You have \$4.7 billion. Give it to kids, not to corporations.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I do want to point out that the plan put forward by the members opposite was unrealistic. The class size suggestions that they put forward were wildly unrealistic, both from a space as well as a funding perspective. That's why we worked with school divisions, school partners, education partners right across this province, as well as the chief medical officer of health to ensure that students can continue to learn safely in class. Obviously, the Christmas holidays and the break coming up in the next month give us an opportunity to bend the curve on the spread of COVID, but we'll continue to work with partners on a realistic plan that keeps kids in the classroom and keeps teachers and students safe.

Budget 2021 Consultation

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, we have heard our Finance minister explain the difficult situation our province faces with the pandemic, global economic contraction, and oil price collapse. I have certainly heard from my constituents who are concerned about the future of their businesses, their jobs, their local economy, and, of course, making ends meet at home. With the next budget coming up early next year, can the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance tell us what he is doing to prepare for Budget 2021?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Alberta faces an unprecedented fiscal challenge unlike any we've witnessed in recent history. We have some tough decisions ahead in Budget 2021, and that's why I've been talking to Albertans through virtual and telephone town halls to hear their perspectives. We've also brought forward three fiscal anchors to guide government decisions and ensure we're best positioned for recovery.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Given that these fiscal challenges appear insurmountable, with many of these factors being out of our control, and given that we are still working to combat COVID-19 and the effects of our response to it and given that all Albertans will be affected by our provincial budget and that I know the people in the constituency I represent are already expressing concerns, to the Minister of Finance: how can Albertans have their say on Budget 2021?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of ways Albertans can share their thoughts, perspectives, and ideas. As part of Budget 2021 consultations we're hosting telephone town halls. The one for northern Alberta was held on Monday. There's one tonight for central Alberta and another tomorrow for southern Alberta. In addition, Albertans can have their say through our online Budget 2021 Survey, or Albertans can submit ideas via e-mail through budget.feedback@gov.ab.ca. There are a number of ways Albertans can submit their thoughts and ideas, and I look forward to reviewing all of them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for his response. Given that it's good news that the Minister of Finance has already been engaging with Albertans across the province and is set to speak with many more in the days to come and given that it is important for Albertans to be engaged and tell the minister what their concerns and ideas are and ask the questions they need to in order to be engaged and informed on the upcoming budget, can the Minister of Finance share with this Chamber what he has been hearing in his consultations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard from many Albertans the story of incredible hardship, which is why we focused on economic recovery. That's why we were the first province to roll out the economic recovery plan. Albertans have also been very vocal about our need to reduce spending where we can. Many Albertans I've heard from understand that we're an outlier in terms of the cost to deliver services, and I've heard that they don't believe we should be an outlier any longer. Albertans are expected to responsibly manage their household spending, and they expect their government to do the same.

Affordable Housing Review

Ms Sigurdson: Yesterday when I asked about rental assistance, I was given talking points from a minister in a different department. I was told about a redesign of the program, which sounds a whole lot like a cut to me. This, unfortunately, makes sense because the UCP has already cut rent supplements by 24 per cent and Albertans are being given notices that their supplement is ending. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: now that there are growing outbreaks in shelters and homelessness is increasing, will you admit your cuts to affordable housing were short-sighted and wrong?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that I have addressed both of these questions a number of times in this House, but I am happy to speak again to the work that's being done by the Minister of Community and Social Services when it comes to those who are experiencing homelessness, not only throughout the pandemic but through all of our ongoing work with municipal and federal partners and community organizations who provide these important services. As I said yesterday, we do have to create a rental supplement program that is efficient but also one that is sustainable for future seniors who are in need of those spaces. We are in fact focusing the redesign on building capacity so we can serve more Albertans. [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that federal partnerships in housing provide huge returns – provinces get more while paying less – and the UCP tragically continue to leave federal money on the table and given that when I point out that affordable housing is a solution to the growing outbreaks in emergency shelters, including the now 60 cases at the Edmonton Convention Centre, the UCP just talk about emergency money they gave for shelters back in the spring, Minister, will you commit to investing more in rent supplements so Albertans can have access to safe housing?

Ms Schulz: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I do want to speak specifically to the issue that the member opposite raised about shelter capacity in Edmonton. Right now we are at 66 per cent. Specifically, when the member opposite is asking questions about the Convention Centre here in the city of Edmonton, I do hope that the member opposite would realize that that is actually being managed by the city of Edmonton. We continue to work with community partners as well as the municipality and our municipal partners to address these needs. I can tell you that there still is shelter capacity, and the minister of housing continues her reviews to ensure that there are spaces available for those who need them.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP's record in government is to give profitable corporations more at the expense of ordinary Albertans – and I fear that changes to housing will be no different – and given that it appears that the UCP's so-called expert redesign of housing seems like a way to subsidize property managers and developers while cutting supports to Albertans, Minister, the corporate handout failed, and it comes at the expense of housing during a pandemic. Will you put your cruel ideological cuts aside and guarantee that increased supports for affordable housing are a part of the economic recovery?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I find this line of questioning very interesting coming from a government that did the complete opposite, which was not listen to Albertans, not consult with Albertans, and try to hide from the problems instead of addressing the problems that exist. That is why the Minister of Seniors and Housing struck the panel on housing, so that we could gain perspectives from all Albertans. Why? Because we are here in this place to represent Albertans, and we owe it to them to listen to their perspectives. That includes housing providers, private companies, and civil society. We'll continue to do the hard work to fix these problems and to listen to Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I'm not sure that if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview had used those statements in a question, they wouldn't have been ruled out of order. I'll just provide a caution at this point.

COVID-19 Outbreaks in Seniors' Care Facilities

Mr. Dach: My heart goes out to the families of the three residents who died due to the outbreak of COVID-19 at the Lynnwood care centre in my riding. I know people who live there very well. Mr. Speaker, a constituent wrote to me that she's worried sick for her sister-in-law who lives there, who suffers from dementia. Her sister-in-law has not been out of bed for 12 days. She has not been able to roll over on her own. Her family is very concerned that regular food and medication has been interrupted, and no one has checked on her frequently because the centre says that AHS is

advising not to go into rooms. To the Minister of Health: where is the plan? Where are the additional staff in these centres?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to speak again about the plan for our continuing care operators and the additional funding we provided to them. They worked with us to come to us with a plan, and that strategy was implemented in the spring. We're continuing to implement that plan. There was \$170 million of additional funding for those 300 sites throughout the province. AHS is also working very closely with all these operators to make sure that they have the resources they need, that they have the PPE, that they have the workforce capacity, and they're going to be able to still comply with all the requirements of the . . .

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

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, very specific measures have to be taken by this government to address this long-term care facility death rate. Given that 56 residents and 18 staff members are sick with COVID-19 at the Lynwood centre and given that there are 45 outbreaks related to long-term care across Alberta and given that these residents and staff are living and working in constant fear and anxiety because of the huge burden this government has placed on them due to their failure to act, to the Premier: if it was one of your loved ones in this facility, would you be turning a blind eye to these Albertans?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that is stooping to a new low, even for the NDP. Nobody is turning a blind eye. We started in January and February to be planning for both the first wave and future waves of the pandemic, working with our continuing care operators. Our hearts go out to all those who have lost a loved one to COVID. All the health care workers that are in continuing care as well as in our hospitals: our hearts go to them as well and thank them for the hard work. It's stressful right now in the second wave, and we're going to continue to make sure that the operators as well as AHS have all the resources they need to respond to this pandemic.

Mr. Dach: Given that specific action needs to be taken – and I urge the Minister of Health to listen closely to something I'll outline right now – and given that public news reports reveal that testing sewage outflows from long-term care centres can detect an imminent outbreak of COVID-19 days before residents begin to test positive and that the U of A is involved in research in this vein and given that knowing about an outbreak even two or three days before people begin testing positive in a long-term care centre would allow staff to put measures in place to prevent a massive outbreak of COVID-19 and that U of A research teams plan to start testing long-term care homes with federal support for this program, what are you doing?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to support AHS. We're going to continue to support our continuing care operators. We have spent almost two billion additional dollars on health care to be able to respond to the pandemic. That's what we're doing. We're going to continue to provide those resources to AHS and especially the public health folks. The researchers in the university who are involved in a lot of the innovative research that's going on to help us be able to respond to the pandemic: we're going to continue to support that work, continue to support that research, and continue to make sure that we have all the resources we need to respond to the pandemic.

COVID-19 Outbreaks in Correctional Facilities

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, it's the fifth time in a month I stand in this Chamber to demand this government answer for its mishandling of COVID-19 in correctional centres. There are currently outbreaks at over half of the correction centres in Alberta, putting the lives of thousands at risk. The latest outbreak is at the Calgary Remand Centre, which started with three cases last week and now has 42 cases. To the Minister of Justice: are you ever going to take action on outbreaks in correctional facilities?

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

Mr. Madu: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, to that particular member, we are taking action. That is why we are working very closely with Alberta Health Services. We have implemented all of the protocols that they have put in place, and we are making sure that we continue to keep staff and the inmates in those facilities safe. That is what we are doing, and that's what we're going to continue to do. What we will not do, you know, is create anxiety within that population. What we must do is do everything we can to keep them safe.

Mr. Sabir: Given that you need to do more and given that inmates at Calgary remand are being triple-bunked, despite physical distancing guidelines and the Mandela rules on imprisonment, and given that defence lawyers and personal advocates have been raising concerns on the effect of the pandemic on inmates and given that these individuals have been trying to reach out to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice for guidance, to either minister: have you finally responded to these urgent appeals, and what action are you taking to handle this situation? Be specific, Minister.

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear: my heart goes out to every single staff and inmate who have tested positive at those facilities and who are right now stressed as a consequence of the current circumstances that we all find ourselves in. I can assure that myself, the Minister of Health, the chief medical officer of health are doing everything we can to make sure that we deploy all of the protocols, all of the resources that are needed in order to keep them safe in those facilities in Edmonton or in Calgary.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the outbreak has put the centre on total lockdown, putting trials on hold as inmates are not being permitted to attend court or appear via CCTV, and given that this outbreak has stalled a murder trial, delaying justice and closure for the family of the victim, and given that this is a clear breach of rights to justice and fair trial, to the Minister of Justice: why did you let this situation get so out of control? Were you busy Twitter-fighting?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.
2:30

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, those are the sort of things that we don't need at this point in time in our history. I can assure that the safety, security, and health of staff and inmates are always the priority of Alberta's correctional facilities. We have, once again, partnered with Alberta Health Services and the chief medical officer of health to ensure that we keep all of our staff and all inmates in all facilities safe here in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, my apologies. There was an error in the question period rotation, so we'll go back to the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Rural High-speed Internet

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Internet in this province is in a troubling state. Many communities lack this crucial tool that is needed for so many different things. However, some companies have decided to try to take on this challenge using satellite technology. There are a few different options available, like Starlink from Tesla owner and entrepreneur Elon Musk as well as Blue Origin from Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. To the Minister of Service Alberta. Both of these seem to be promising solutions for the challenge of rural Internet access. Has the government considered either of these technologies?

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you to the member. I want to advise this House that the Minister of Service Alberta and I recently had a call with the head of the Starlink program for all of the world, Mr. Speaker, and it was an encouraging call. Many of the satellites already cover good chunks of the province of Alberta. They've called their beta test program better than nothing. That's tongue-in-cheek, but that is what we've had in many of our rural communities, almost nothing, when it comes to Internet service. That's not good enough. That's why our Minister of Service Alberta is exploring these technologies, amongst others, to make sure that rural Albertans have access to the broadband speeds that they need to be able to access education and the economy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for the answer. Given that the challenges facing rural Alberta through their lack of Internet access have presented large problems for some municipalities and given that some communities have had to choose between infrastructure and finding ways to get Internet access to their citizens and given that the digital chasm between rural and urban Alberta continues to grow, to the same minister: can you provide an update to this House as to where we are at currently with the ongoing efforts to get rural Alberta connected?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest things that we can do as a government from an economic opportunity perspective and education perspective for rural Albertans is to make sure that they have access to high-speed Internet and broadband. Our Minister of Service Alberta is exploring multiple options. In some communities it makes sense going, you know, 10 kilometres, 20 kilometres with fibre. In other communities low Earth orbit satellites, like what SpaceX is putting forward, might be the right solution. We're exploring all of the above. We're working with the federal government as well on their initiative, that was announced here recently, to make sure that we can be there for these communities, to make sure that they can have access to the economy of tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that the future viability of these communities is at risk if the Internet problems don't get fixed and given that the Internet is needed for everything from small businesses to hospitals and given that some businesses are having to deal with constant service drops that make it almost impossible to process noncash transactions and further given that solving the rural Internet issue would help accelerate Alberta's recovery plan, to the same minister: what are the plans for the future action to ensure that all Albertans have access to strong and fast Internet?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're working with telecom companies, we're working with these new entrepreneurial companies to make sure that we can provide this. It really does highlight how we can level the playing field for job opportunities for all Albertans in every single community. They used to say that banking jobs had to be in downtown Toronto on Bay Street, yet Bay Street hasn't been functioning effectively for about nine months. It's all been done remotely, all been done from people's home. If we could provide that broadband speed to people in rural communities, the sky is the limit on opportunities, from job creation to coding to what they've done traditionally in their communities. This is really important: to level the playing field, making sure that every single person in all of our communities has access to the jobs that are there, the high-paying jobs of today and tomorrow.

Support for Disability Workers

Ms Renaud: Disability workers are essential workers. They should be supported to ensure that Albertans with disabilities are appropriately cared for during a pandemic. As cases of COVID-19 continue to rise because of this government's inaction, this work gets more intense, with staffing shortages and an ever-expanding scope. The workers deserve a pay top-up. The UCP fiscal update says that the federal government provided \$14.4 million for wage top-ups for disability workers, but workers haven't seen a penny. Minister, where is the money, and when will these workers get the wage top-up they deserve?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The reality is that we have been providing wage top-ups for health care aides that are serving in continuing care homes and long-term care homes, and ministers right now are assessing additional need and working with their federal counterparts on determining future program rollouts.

Ms Renaud: Given there's a very big difference between health care aides, long-term care workers, and disability workers and given that 90 per cent of these workers are in the private sector – so most don't have sufficient benefits or access to sufficient sick pay – and given that disability workers are at high risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19 due to the very personal nature of their care and given that every Albertan who has contracted COVID-19 or is a close contact of someone who has had to isolate, Minister, will you provide sick pay to every disability worker who doesn't currently have it?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are extremely grateful for and inspired by the essential support workers who provide care and have continued to provide uninterrupted care for those who have disabilities, especially over the last eight to nine months. As recognition for that work the government of Alberta will provide eligible service providers with a \$14.4 million grant to distribute to essential support workers working in overnight staff residences and out-of-home placements. These workers have in fact taken on additional challenges to meet the increased health and personal needs, and we want to thank them for that.

Ms Renaud: Well, given that gratitude is great but paying people appropriately is so much better – I'm glad to hear that the money will be moving out – and given that that money has been transferred by the federal government for months, disability workers are

waiting. They're still waiting, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: can you further explain to disability workers if this top-up will include additional access to sick pay?

The Speaker: The Minister for Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and that is an important question. This is work that the Minister of Community and Social Services is actively working on with partners and stakeholders in this area to determine the number of essential support workers eligible for this recognition funding. The amounts of funding and the details will be determined by the information we receive from those stakeholders, and payments will then be provided as soon as possible. On this side of the House we don't make decisions based on ideology. We recognize and are grateful for the work that our community stakeholders do, and we work with them to address their needs.

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

Provincial Fiscal Update and Forecasts

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board recently tabled the mid-year fiscal update and economic statement. This is showing Alberta's current and forecasted economic state. Even though this government promised a balanced budget in our first term, we have been facing unexpected circumstances with the COVID-19 pandemic. To the Minister of Finance: when can we expect to have a balanced budget, and how much has the COVID-19 pandemic affected this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that the economic collapse caused by COVID-19 has had a huge impact on Alberta's revenues, and unfortunately that will mean that we will have to delay balancing the budget from our plan in Budget 2019. In the meantime we're bringing forward some fiscal anchors that will guide our decisions during this time. The first fiscal anchor is this. We are going to align our spending on a per capita basis with that of other provinces. The second fiscal anchor is that we are going to ensure that our net debt-to-GDP ratio stays under 30 per cent. The third anchor will be to deliver a defensible date once we have more clarity.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans need to continue to have world-class health care, education, and other public services and given that public services have had issues with unnecessary spending, especially under the previous government, and given that we need the spending under control, to the same minister: how can we ensure Albertans are receiving world-class services while limiting unnecessary spending like that that the NDP put in place?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

2:40

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Improving the services for Albertans is something that we strive for every day, and more important now than ever is delivering services most efficiently. Quality services and efficient delivery of those services are not mutually exclusive concepts as the members opposite would have us believe. Our expenses, not including COVID measures, have actually decreased \$156 million from Budget 2020. That's due to

our commitment to providing quality services to Albertans while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government introduced the job-creation tax cut in order to create a better environment for job creators and investment in our province and given that the NDP claimed that this will be major lost revenue for the Alberta government and given that that is false and given that we need the revenue of corporate taxes as well as taxes from working Albertans in order to balance the budget, to the same minister: what effect will the job-creation tax cut have on the deficit?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The latest estimate shows the job-creation tax cut will result in reduced revenues of between \$200 million and \$300 million per year. That is a far cry from the billions of dollars the opposition mislead Albertans with. The fact is that the job-creation tax cut will position this province to attract investment, create jobs, and expand fiscal capacity in the future. Without economic recovery we will not meet our fiscal challenge. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, I'd like to take one quick moment to say a very quick and special hello to Jackson Kjenner, who works as a membership co-ordinator at the Cold Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce, who tunes in every day, if you can believe it, to see our important work. Hello, Jackson.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will return to the daily Routine.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill 207, Reservists' Recognition Day Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont. This bill was referred to the committee on November 18, 2020, the year of our Lord. The committee's final report recommends that Bill 207 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I wondered if presenting a report as such is just like scoring a hat trick on your birthday. A very happy birthday to the hon. member.

Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in a report on Bill 207, Reservists' Recognition Day Act, is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak to the report? If so, please rise.

Seeing none, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has requested concurrence in the report on Bill 207, Reservists' Recognition Day Act.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has a tabling of a return or report.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Though in my day I never did score a hat trick, I did get buckets.

In accordance with section 19(1)(a) of the Auditor General Act as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I am pleased to table the results, a report of the Auditor General of Alberta for the year ended March 31, 2020. Copies of this report will also be provided to members.

Tablings to the Clerk

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:02 the hon. the opposition deputy House leader raised a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's under 23(h), (i), and (j). It was in relation to a question raised by my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre about government health policy, in particular relating to the news in the media about rationing of oxygen, a pretty reasonable question. The Minister of Health, instead of answering, went on a personal rant against that member. That's pretty much the pattern that we have seen from this minister instead of answering these questions. Then he went on to say that – I can't say it directly, but I will still say the L-word, implying that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was lying. I think that's unparliamentary. If you can't do something directly, you cannot do it indirectly. That's disrespectful to this House. That's disrespectful to these rules. The member should retract, apologize, and resign.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a transcript of the moment that the deputy House leader called that point of order. The transcript that I have says that the minister said "none of that is true," which provides confirmation to the opposition that the facts they were presenting were not true. He certainly did not call them liars. "We were preparing for the second wave . . . in March," he then says. "We knew there was going to be a second wave in the fall." Also true. "Again, the member is fearmongering about oxygen and being, quite frankly, [Mr. Speaker] – well . . . Sorry. The NDP – I will try my best to be parliamentary . . . with this type of language, it's hard not to call it for what it is."

Nowhere does he refer to lying in the transcript that I've got. I do sympathize with the Health minister. It's hard not to call out the NDP's blatant fearmongering in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, with unparliamentary words. However, I commend the Health minister for committing to continuing with parliamentary words, which is what it says, according to the transcript I have. If there's something different, then I'd be happy to address it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I'm happy to rule on this point of order. I do have the benefit of the Blues, which the hon. Government House Leader knows is the official transcript. The statement that was made by the hon. the Minister of Health is the following, according to the Blues:

Again, the member is fearmongering about oxygen and being, quite . . . well, no. Sorry.

I use the punctuation to ensure that this is the important part.

The NDP – I will try my best to be parliamentary, but with that type of language, it's hard . . . to call it for what it is and not use the L-word. But look, the Calgary zone . . .

And he goes on.

Now, the hon. member, I would suggest, according to the Blues, was at that time specifically referring to the NDP. He went on to do something indirectly which you couldn't do directly. But earlier in the routine I referred specifically to the use of the word "lying" and how it was not helpful. Even in this case, when the member was speaking specifically to the NDP lying – although, he was doing it in an indirect manner, which he couldn't do directly, so I'd like to remind everybody that that also is inappropriate – this has not been considered to be a point of order over a long period of time.

Although, I have spoken to this very issue at some length. In fact, previous Speakers as well have said – June 18, 2019:

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

I have the sense that that will help increase the level of decorum.

Hon. members, I provided a very strong reminder prior to question period about the use of the word "lying." If members are going to insist on forcing the Speaker to rule on the use of the word lying, I am happy to do so. Let's use some personal discretion when it comes to the use of the word "lying," even if we're talking about the other side as a group of individuals, because that has not proved to be productive.

I consider the matter dealt with and concluded. It is not a point of order.

We are at Ordres du jour.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Adjournment of Fall Session

50. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2020 fall sitting of the Assembly be extended beyond the first Thursday in December until such time as or when the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, and at such time the Assembly stands adjourned.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move Government Motion 50.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) this motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 50 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 43 Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act

The Chair: We are on amendment A2. Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is certainly an honour to rise in the Chamber this afternoon as it is always an honour and a privilege to do the job that we do and to be able to represent our constituents. This is, in fact, my first time in debate this week in the House, and I just always like to start by acknowledging all the incredible front-line workers that are doing so much for us right now. If any of them are watching, whether you're in health care, in retail, whatever it might be, we support you, and we know how hard you're working, and we know the pressures that you're facing. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

I have not yet had a chance to share a lot of my thoughts on Bill 43, which is Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act. While I assure the government that I will speak to the amendment specifically, I just wanted to talk a little bit about some of my concerns with the bill and tie it in to the amendment that is in front of us.

You know, it's just so interesting to me that this government has repeatedly labelled us as fearmongering and spreading fear on a number of issues. [interjection] I can't wait for that member who is currently heckling to stand up and speak to this bill. It's interesting on this one because we did warn Albertans that the UCP was planning to bring in tolls, and when we said that, how did the Premier respond? Well, he claimed that we were fearmongering. Interestingly enough, just as we can point to with many examples where we didn't spread fear but instead simply raised concerns about what we'd heard, it came true. In this case we now have the proof with this bill in front of us, Bill 43, Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act. I just realized that that spells out FAST, so, I mean, perhaps we can say that the government pulled a fast one on Albertans.

You know, it's interesting. I also wanted to just talk about the fact that everybody in this House has travelled this province. I'm sure all of us are quite proud to call this province our home. I've talked many times in this Legislature about growing up in rural Alberta and spending a lot of time particularly in northern Alberta. Peace River country is actually an area that is close to my heart. While I didn't grow up there – I grew up in Barrhead, of course, for those who have been paying attention – the Peace River area was an important one for my parents. My mom grew up in northern Alberta – in fact, the same area as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview – in the Valleyview area. I believe they were even schoolmates for a short time. Don't worry; my mom had me extremely young, so I'm not calling that member aged at all. But they did grow up together in the north.

When my mom left the Valleyview, Little Smoky area, she went to Peace River for her final year of high school and lived up in that area. You know, interestingly enough, she tells a lot of good stories about the north, and we've still got some family members around that area, not specifically in the La Crête area, but that's the connection to this bill that I wanted to bring in.

What this government did is that they basically held the folks of that area hostage by saying, you know, "Unless you're willing to accept tolls, we're not going to build you the bridge that you've been asking for," which is quite interesting. When the UCP Infrastructure minister was called on this, he basically belittled their concerns. Again, I know a lot of folks up in northern Alberta, and I can't imagine they were happy with their concerns being dismissed

as they were. In fact, what did he say? He said: "You know what? If you don't want to pay tolls to cross the mighty Peace River, then you can go the long way around," which, for anybody who knows that area in the north, adds about two hours extra onto that trip. That's certainly not fair to the hard-working folks of northern Alberta.

This brings me back to the amendment and my specific concerns about some of the elements of this piece of legislation. This isn't a piece of legislation that's simply for one project. It's not simply about the La Crête bridge, no matter how this government tries to spin it. Now, if the members opposite are in fact being truthful about this being simply an enabling act for the construction of that bridge, then they should, by all means, be willing to accept this amendment because all this amendment does is that it adds in an expiration date. You're telling us, the government, we're trusting you – I mean, I know we have many reasons not to trust you, but we're trying to work together and do good work for the people of Alberta. You know, if we can trust you on this matter, that, in fact, the intent of this bill is to allow for the completion of the bridge in La Crête, then why would you have any concerns with accepting this amendment that puts an expiry date on it?

Just let me give a little bit more information for folks who maybe haven't been following. Based on the introduction by the Minister of Transportation on this piece of legislation, he noted that the cost will be about \$200 million. He introduced the calculations done by the government on the length of payment based on the fee of \$150 for commercial vehicles and \$10 to \$20 for personal vehicles. That minister stated that it would take 30 years for the bridge to be paid in full through tolls. So 30 years: it seems quite reasonable on our side of the House, then, that we could introduce an amendment that puts an expiry on that act, right? The bridge will have been paid for and, thus, a limitation makes reasonable sense.

However, I am concerned, given this government's record on accepting our reasonable amendments to date, that they will possibly reject this amendment. I won't say I'm warning – that's perhaps too harsh a word – but I'm suggesting that, you know, unless your plan, unless your ploy is to open up the addition of tolls to any new lane or highway, bridge in this province, unless that's your intention, you should have no reason to reject this amendment that we've put in front of you.

3:00

I think this government needs to – you know, admittedly, I stand a lot in this House and speak about bills that I'm getting an influx of correspondence on. I can admit that I do not have an influx of correspondence on this piece of legislation. A part of that would be because the people of Alberta have been absolutely inundated by terrible, harmful bills by this government. I guess I'm warning the government that if they reject this amendment, it's another example of them breaking their promises to the people of Alberta. I'm suggesting that if you reject this amendment, you'll also be hearing from a lot more of your constituents.

The Chair: Hon. member.

Member Irwin: Yes?

The Chair: Just a reminder to speak through the chair.

Member Irwin: Yeah. Sorry, Chair. Thank you. You know, I could see that everybody was so captivated across the floor there. I'll try to speak through you moving forward.

Mr. Schow: Absolutely riveted.

Member Irwin: I can see that.

I'm certainly encouraging strongly this government to consider this. You know, it's a long record. I don't even have time to go through the long record of broken promises by this government and ways in which they've insulted my constituents and Albertans across this province. I would suggest that either way Albertans truly do want to know the intentions of their government, and by pulling a fast one, by bringing in sneaky tolls and other approaches, I would suggest that they're putting themselves in jeopardy. Again, we're talking about, in this case, examples of hard-working rural Albertans. Those that did vote for this government certainly didn't vote for additional costs to be levied on them.

I think we also need to talk about the fact that, you know, while this government continues to claim that this is just about that one bridge, we're certainly concerned – we're certainly concerned – about the impact on other projects moving forward. It allows tolls quite simply – read the legislation – on everything, and that is a significant impact on Albertans who are already struggling to make ends meet, right? Those are folks that I'm hearing from every day, who are struggling to pay rent, who are struggling to pay bills, and to add additional costs at a time when they're struggling just seems so unreasonable.

I would ask as well: who was consulted on this, right? How much consultation took place on Bill 43? From what I gather from the debate so far, this government can't point to a significant number of stakeholders that they engaged with on such a significant piece of legislation. You know, for a government that speaks a whole heck of a lot about the power of referenda, perhaps they could have approached such a substantial issue, that impacts communities, in that manner and not through a piece of legislation that they're hoping to ram through in the midst of a pandemic.

With that, I'm going to strongly encourage the government to accept our amendment on Bill 43 and look forward to – if there are other folks on the government side who can respond to some of the concerns I raised, I'd be happy to hear those. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: I see the hon. Member for Peace River on amendment A2.

Mr. Williams: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I very much appreciate the opportunity to rise, and I'll let the minister speak to some of the larger concerns surrounding the legislation, Bill 43. The member opposite who just spoke, my hon. friend across the aisle, I think has a genuine connection to the north, but I'm afraid the individual speaking is completely mistaken on the position of the residents surrounding this bridge. The truth is, without a doubt, that consultations happened. They happened numerous times with numerous groups, stakeholders of all different varieties: business, individuals, the Métis settlement. Resoundingly, they want the bridge, they want to pay for it with industry, and it is not a debate.

The member opposite asked the question, didn't even ask the question, made the statement that somehow this government is holding residents of northern Alberta hostage. The gall, Madam Chair, to assert that somehow by listening to the constituents of northern Peace Country, we're somehow holding them hostage. The members opposite are dismissing this after their talking points are finished.

The truth is, Madam Chair, that the member does not live in my constituency. The member does not commute to work over an ice bridge daily – over an ice bridge – when it is in, when the water is not too low or too high for a ferry, when there are no obstacles coming down upstream from B.C. or further upstream in the Peace River in Alberta, when we do not have fog. When we have the ability to run it seasonally, the ferry or the ice bridge, when it's thick

enough, is the only time you can cross. The truth is that this is not being held hostage. There is no other option. In the town of Peace River there are 17,000 cars that commute daily across that bridge. That was the town that the member opposite referenced where her mother moved north to. Well, when I go south to Peace River, I'm a part of those 17,000 cars traversing. At the crossing at Tompkins Landing . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I realize we talk a little bit louder with masks on in this Chamber; however, there is a point at which the volume is too loud and the speaker cannot be heard. I will say this to all members in this House at that time.

The hon. Member for Peace River, please continue.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's appreciated to have some decorum while I'm speaking on behalf of my constituents on what is a matter of great importance to their economic and personal livelihood. The truth is that dismissing this point of what they are asking for is an affront not just to those members but to the Chamber and our job to represent our constituents' needs.

The truth is, Madam Chair, that there are 17,000 cars that cross the town of Peace River, where a bridge was recently built, rightfully so. At Tompkins Landing there are 400 cars a day. Nothing is being held hostage here. There is no economic plan to have a government build a bridge on tax-collected dollars at Tompkins Landing. It is not feasible. It is not reasonable. It was not anywhere close to on the discussion agenda with the former NDP government. The only reason we're having the discussion about a bridge where there is currently nothing in my constituency is because of the ability to do so through user fees in Bill 43. That is it.

That is economic opportunity, in the construction of the bridge itself, in what is a difficult hit area of northern Alberta, but more importantly it is economic opportunity that will be paid for by industry because they will save money by driving across the bridge with the certainty, with their log trucks, with their chip trucks, with the dirt-work equipment going back and forth.

This is incredibly important. It is not a talking point for individuals from Barrhead or Calgary or Edmonton to throw out and dismiss. This is the livelihood of individuals in my constituency that cross an ice bridge daily to get to work. I understand that the members opposite currently commute to work by one of the wonderfully maintained roads here in the city of Edmonton. That is not true for my constituents. Have some sympathy, please. Have some understanding of the world we live in in northern Alberta, which has extracted so much wealth that belongs to the people of Alberta for our common good. Here we're not even asking for the government to reinvest that wealth back into my constituency. We're saying, "Let us use our own dollars to pay for it," and somehow we are, as the government, holding my constituents hostage? I find that appalling, Madam Chair, that this is the tone taken.

I invite any member, including the member who spoke previously, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, to come to my constituency to cross the ice bridge with me, to cross the ferry, wait for an hour to two hours on a Friday night or a Monday morning before they can cross the bridge or the ferry. I encourage any of them to understand the sheer scale of this province, the economic wealth that we have contributed, and the request that this Legislature let us spend our own dollars to build a \$200 million infrastructure project for the province, that will belong to the province afterwards. Talk about community spirit. Talk about provincial pride: 200 million of our dollars going in in addition to

our tax dollars, in addition to the wealth extracted from resources in the rural north, this bridge on top of that.

3:10

I genuinely ask seriously any member to drive with me the seven hours north to get there from Edmonton. They don't have to drive in the same vehicle – we can be COVID conscious; we can drive separately – but I ask them, please, to come up. I challenge any one of them who votes against this bill or opposes it in any form to come up and see Tompkins Landing currently. There is currently no ice bridge. There is currently no ferry operating.

Let's hope it gets cold soon. The farmers and I agree: as soon as the harvest is off and the ferry stops running, let's let those temperatures drop because then we can get to and from. It helps our forestry industry save thousands of dollars every day that they're bringing their logs and their chips to and from the mill and the block or the chips go to another mill for processing. Every single day thousands of dollars are spent extra. I'm sure that if you calculate all the different mills, all the different industry, we can have an insane amount of money, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, if not more, of dollars wasted every year because there's no bridge.

The solution to that that this government is proposing is: no cost to the government, they will get a bridge at the end of it, constituents will save time and money, industry will save money. And the opposition says no. Everything is saying yes, Madam Chair, to this except the opposition. Everything about this is an easy win for everyone, every single stakeholder involved. I'd like to know who the members opposite are consulting in my constituency, stakeholders major or minor, where they say: this is a horrible idea.

I have an idea that they're more concerned about stoking fear about the Henday or the Deerfoot than they do about my constituents. If that's the case, call it what it is, Madam Chair. Call it what it is. Quit disgracing the role that we have in this Legislature by pretending that you care about my constituents by voting against this bill. I'm telling you that you don't. This matters massively to my constituents.

An Hon. Member: Madam Chair, point of order.

The Chair: Hon. member, I caution you to direct your comments through the chair, which I believe will address that point of order. Please proceed.

Mr. Williams: Understood. Any comment that I made that may have offended or been against standing orders I withdraw and apologize for.

You can see, Madam Chair, that there's passion. The passion that I have is the passion of my constituents, who have made their voice loud and clear. I refer you to the chamber of commerce of La Crête. I refer you to the municipality of High Level, the municipality of Mackenzie county. I refer you to conversations we've had with local Métis communities in Paddle Prairie. They are very, very excited about the possibility of economic opportunity opening up in the north. It is important for my constituents that I represent this forcefully.

If members opposite decide to ignore it, let that be their choice, but I'm not going to come here and tell the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that I know her constituents' needs and that they have told me something that is not true. I will not do that. I invite the member to come north. Any member that wants to speak to this bill, come with me. I'll be rising in Committee of the Whole every single speech after the NDP speaks, inviting that member to come north, if they oppose this legislation in any form, for them to understand first-hand the time that it takes to commute currently around Tompkins Landing to the only bridge north of Peace River,

at Fort Vermilion. If they don't want to – maybe it takes too much time out of their day – I'd say: point made, Madam Chair. Point made.

It does take a lot of time to live up north, and I imagine the members genuinely are very grateful for what the north has contributed to this province. I ask them only to let us contribute to our own infrastructure now.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2 on Bill 43?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 43, in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this bill. I appreciate the passion of the previous speaker although I will clarify some of the comments, I think, that my colleague was trying to make and maybe clarify some of the comments or points that the member rose to speak to. No one is disputing the fact that the people of the north are in dire need of a bridge. We recognize the fact that, especially in the north, you know, when you're waiting for ice roads, one, they're dangerous, and two, there's also a delay for them to be frozen enough. I can only imagine the burden it places on industry and also individuals trying to cross up north.

You know, the bill is not just about that bridge. I appreciate the member's passion, and if it was only for that bridge, I think there's a good chance that the NDP opposition could get behind it, but it's not just for that one piece of infrastructure. I'm going to speak to the member's comments but then more broadly to the bill, and it's the bill that I have an issue with.

Now, I will clarify for the record that when my colleague talked about the people up north being held hostage, the reason that language was used is because if the option that they had was no bridge or that you have to pay out of your own pocket for a bridge, that's not really an option. For me, what frustrates me is that the government spends about \$55 billion, has made certain spending priorities their priority, and then has said to the people up north: "I'm sorry. We don't have money for the bridge. In addition to your tax dollars, you can pay out of pocket." I would love to know – I would love to know – how excited the chamber was that their businesses are now going to pay additional user fees.

Now, maybe, Madam Chair – and it's quite possible – the people up north have said: "You know what? No, we don't want to pay additional fees, but we're willing to swallow it if it's the only way to get the bridge built." My frustration and the reason why they're being held hostage is that that's not the only way the bridge can get built, but that is what the government has put to these people: if you want a bridge, you're paying additionally for it, your tax dollars. The wealth that has come out of the north is not good enough to warrant the government spending a couple of hundred million out of their \$55 billion budget to build a bridge. It's: we are going to nickel and dime you.

For me, Madam Chair, my frustration is that for a government that talks about standing up for business and saving Albertans money, this is another example of nickel and diming the people of this province through user fees, through extraneous costs. I mean, listen, the UCP government is the only government in decades in the province that are raising these fees in a wealth-by-stealth approach of: we're going to nickel and dime you, and then we're going to claim that we're making life more affordable. Well, you're not.

Now, the issue with this bill – and I think I’ve covered all my points about Tompkins Landing. Just on a point that the member was making more broadly, I think it’s really important that members in the Chamber remember that we all represent Albertans. We are all team Alberta. It really bothers me when members try to pit one region against another. I mean, that’s how we lose globally, quite frankly, when we’re busy fighting ourselves in our own province.

Now, the reality is that no member in this Chamber received 100 per cent of the votes from their constituents, at least to my knowledge when I look at Elections Alberta. In some regions there may have been fewer votes, but no single member can say that they received a hundred per cent of the votes. But we all have a responsibility to represent every single one of our constituents regardless of who they voted for.

My point in this, Madam Chair, is just that we are all wanting what’s best for all Albertans regardless of where we live. You know, I have been up north. It is beautiful, and I’ve said this before in the Chamber. Within the province of Alberta we are truly, truly blessed although I do think that the people of the Peace Country have a strong argument when they say that it’s God’s country.

Now, if this bill was only about that bridge, I can assure, through you, Madam Chair, to the member, that I would be supporting it, but it’s about opening the door for the use of toll roads and toll bridges throughout the province, and that I have a concern with. Albertans pay their fair share in taxes. In exchange for those taxes, whether it’s personal or business, they deserve to have infrastructure to be able to go about their day to day. Also, our businesses need to have certainty.

3:20

I’d love to know how many businesses were consulted on this bill who said: yes, we are happy to pay an additional toll road. What the government has done, if I want to use their own arguments that they gave against us years ago when we introduced the price on carbon: you’ve now made it more expensive to move goods because businesses are going to have to pay the toll fee. I don’t know of any businesses that jumped up and said, “Yes, we are happy to pay this; let’s move forward,” outside of that region in Alberta because they were presented with: this is the only option. The people there, including the chamber, probably did say begrudgingly: I guess we’ll pay a user fee if that’s the only way we can get a bridge.

In the rest of the province, you know, I know the Minister of Finance talked about adding another lane to the Deerfoot and made a comment around the fact that that will never happen unless it’s through a toll. You know, I’d like the minister to take a look at the economic impact of the Deerfoot and of the people in southern Alberta who use it. Have they not paid their fair share that they deserve out of the tax dollars that they spend to have access to infrastructure?

I mean, the reality, Madam Chair, is that that’s another example of how this government’s decisions are actually deterring business because it now just became more expensive to move goods throughout the province. Now, I’m sure the minister and the government will jump up and assure us that they will use this bill very sparingly and that it’s only for certain infrastructure projects. The problem is that there is no collar on this bill. It can be used as often as the government wants for whatever infrastructure is needed.

Now, on the point that my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood made that at the moment her office hasn’t been inundated with correspondence on this bill: I would argue it’s because people are so busy trying to deal with COVID. Is this important? Yes. You know, when you’re going to hear about it is when the government announces that the Deerfoot is being expanded and that Albertans

get to pay an additional fee to drive on that extra lane. The problem, though, is that it’s too late, that this will already be put in place.

What’s frustrating – and the members opposite have to own this – is that their leader promised that this was not coming in. This is not part of your election platform, and if it is, please jump up and point to the page, and I will gladly apologize and withdraw that comment. But it wasn’t in your platform, and in fact, worse, your leader promised that you wouldn’t bring in toll roads and accused us, the opposition, of fearmongering. Okay. Well, it’s here in black and white now. What do you have to say to the fact that you broke your promise? You brought in a bill that allows for user fees and tolling infrastructure.

Now, there are many examples of the use of tolls in the province of Ontario, and there are many examples where it’s gone really, really sideways as far as costs and fees. You know, Alberta has not had to bring in any toll infrastructure in our history. Again, I look at the fact that the government is making conscious choices on where to spend tax dollars and where not to spend them. It’s not that Alberta has no money. It’s that these are the choices that this current government is making, and it’s downloading costs onto the backs of ordinary Albertans time and time and time again.

As I’ve mentioned, Madam Chair, the fact of the matter is that if the inboxes of the members opposite aren’t being overloaded with concerned Albertans, believe me, the day you make an announcement and put up a big shiny billboard that says, “This road is brought to you by you,” because you’re paying for it and you’ll continue to pay for it every time you use it, I think that’s when Albertans will be scratching their heads and wondering: “Well, don’t I pay a significant amount in taxes? What are you doing with my tax dollars if you’re now making me pay additional fees for critical infrastructure?”

You know, again, our previous amendment – I realize that it was voted down, Madam Chair – was trying to at least put a timeline collar on this piece of legislation. I mean, I’d like to see some restrictions placed on this so that the current government or future governments, quite frankly, can’t just run around and slap up tolls on everything under the sun. I can tell you that when businesses are looking at either setting up shop here or relocating here, they are looking at the whole envelope of costs, and having a bunch of toll roads is going to be a deterrent.

You know, similar to making cuts to our education system, making cuts to our postsecondary system, inadequately funding our health care system – I get that today, for example, the Premier jumped up and talked about the new money being invested. That’s for COVID. We’re talking about pre-COVID for our actual health care system because quality of life, that a good education system and a strong health care system fit into, is in fact in the top three priorities for – and I’ll narrow it down – most global tech firms. Whittling away at that does not make Alberta more attractive. It does the opposite.

You know, there are a number of examples of private operators of highways in other jurisdictions that have gouged consumers, that haven’t worked the way they were supposed to. So it’s frustrating.

Now, what’s interesting, Madam Chair, is that in the bill there is a section that talks about: tolls will only be put in place in three different circumstances. Now, the third one is that tolls will only be put in after community consultation. That word “consultation”: for a long time it’s been debated in this Chamber and outside of this Chamber and in other chambers, quite frankly. I know that there are many examples where consultation turns out to be that an e-mail was sent to someone, and that’s considered consultation. It’ll be quite interesting.

I would love for the Minister of Transportation to hold a town hall in Calgary to say: oh, by the way, you’re going to get some new infrastructure, but you’re going to be paying for it out of your

pocket. I'd love to know how that goes. In fact, I'd love an invitation to that one. I would imagine that Calgarians would be appalled at the thought.

Again, you know, my question to the government is that if we're trying to fix a specific problem in northern Alberta, then let's have a piece of legislation that does that, but using that as the reason for this bill I can't get behind. Again, it's not because the people of northern Alberta don't deserve a bridge. They do. They don't deserve to sit and wait hours and hours and hours. They don't deserve to be cut off from the rest of the province depending on the season and the time of year that they happen to cross. I can only imagine the additional costs to businesses that have to go around: the travel time, the gas, all of it. I think that there's another way, but if there wasn't another way, then let's fix that problem. Let's not create a whole host of new problems and raise fees on Albertans all over the province.

You know, for those reasons, at the moment I can't support this bill, though I do believe one of my colleagues will have another amendment shortly. I hope I'm not speaking out of turn. I will jump back into the conversation but urge the government to consider amendments to at least let us focus this bill a little bit and try to improve it so that it can't be used inappropriately.

Thank you.

3:30

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 43? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member opposite for his speech and contribution to the debate. As promised in my last speech, I'll be rising again to make the point that my constituents are asking me to make here in the Legislature on their behalf. When I speak on their behalf, I'm speaking very confidently knowing that this is what is good for the community and the constituency.

Now, the member who just gave his speech, I thought, tried to make two separate points. He said: one, I support the bridge, but I don't want to support the bill. Well, the truth is that I can't build the bridge without the bill. We're not going to spend \$200 million to build a bridge for 400 cars at Tompkins Landing – now, this is my memory of first-year university and the syllogism of Aristotle – therefore, the only way to build the bridge is with the bill, right? The truth is that the members opposite are looking for some kind of restriction or limitation, or how do we know this won't be abused?

Well, I can give you a couple. I've read the bill a number of times. It says that this will not be imposed on existing infrastructure. The Deerfoot is fine. I'll remind the chair, after my warning, that this really isn't about Peace River and my constituency and my bridge for the NDP; it really is just about Edmonton and Calgary. Members opposite continue to focus on Edmonton and Calgary. When they refer to my constituency, they say misleading and inaccurate statements like: this is just like the carbon tax as an expense to moving goods. Well, it doesn't, Madam Chair, because, as the members opposite know, the geography is – this will save money because you no longer have to pay the gas and the super-B rental fees for going all the way around. This will be less expensive. It will make life easier for individuals in my constituency.

What limitations are there? Well, there's the fact that the bill promises that it won't be used on the kind of infrastructure that members opposite are suggesting it's going to be used on. But, more importantly – and this is really where the rubber meets the road, Madam Chair – if individuals don't want to use the bridge, they're going to continue going around with the option that they have, and the bridge won't collect the fees that it needs to pay it down, and it

won't be a viable project. I'm certain that it will continue in the time going forward to be a viable project because businesses who have trucks full of logs and chips and other goods, agricultural products as well, will continue to choose the user fee rather than the more expensive route around.

So this does two things, Madam Chair. First, it makes the point that there are some restrictions. There's the economic reality that bridges and infrastructure like this, new infrastructure, expanded infrastructure, will only be built with user fees where individuals choose to use it. They have to choose to want that. Otherwise, they would use the existing routes that we all have now, that are paid for out of the general purse. That is, I think, a very important distinction. Secondly, not only is it a restriction, a limitation on where a government would decide to do this, but it also proves the point that it is less expensive to use the infrastructure. It is not more expensive. The members opposite are being disingenuous when they say that this akin to a carbon tax. This instead is making business easier for my constituents.

Now, we had the member ask: is it really the case that the chamber of commerce is supporting this, or are they kind of, you know, arm-twisted into it? The truth is that that is not the case. I can read a couple of aspects of this letter, that I received to my office and was also forwarded to the government, from the chamber of commerce.

Various comments have been added to the political debate around the idea of toll infrastructure in Alberta and we feel that political debate is important, however the La Crete community is completely in support of this proposed toll project and do not want ... to lose it ... [or] for someone to score a short sighted political victory. Our northern community arrived late for the provincial infrastructure projects in the 1960s and 1970s, [and] we are [at] an infrastructure deficit compared to [the rest of the province].

I'm paraphrasing that last line.

We are not looking for a handout of public funds, we want to use this opportunity to work in partnership with the province to build and improve our northern [community] and this place we call home.

On behalf of our over 350 business membership ...

In answer to the member's question, in my community 350 businesses are represented by one of the groups consulted.

... as well as the general public we thank you ...

To the government, referring to the minister.

... for your consideration of this crucial piece of infrastructure and the many ways it would greatly enhance our community's further development and quality of life.

The letter goes on to continue talking about the importance of access to health care, the importance of economic trade routes, the importance of relationships with neighbouring communities, all of this made possible by them having the bridge that is paid for by this bill. It is not a possibility to have this bridge built outside of this bill passed.

So I again ask the members opposite to support this and to understand – I can imagine that there are other communities that will ask: can we build this? We understand that there are not opportunities currently for us to do that because perhaps there are 400 cars where the threshold is 17,000, as is the case in my constituency, for a new bridge. Perhaps there are other projects across the province where they, too, want to.

For those projects – in all likelihood the majority of those will be in rural Alberta – we ask that you pass this bill and vote for it. I implore every member to do so, and I thank the minister for his vision in deciding to bring this legislation forward. It is an opportunity for us to take a win for the community in northern Peace Country. It is an opportunity for us to offer this possibility to

communities across the province. It is the height of arrogance for us in this Chamber to tell citizens they cannot, when they want to, use their own money to build infrastructure that will increase economic opportunities, access to health care, relationships between communities.

It boggles my mind that members are trying to pit this as some political wedge for citizens in Edmonton and Calgary. It boggles my mind that this is what they focus on when it's abundantly clear – I mean, I ask the member to go to the La Crête chamber of commerce and really clarify these statements that they made from the 350 constituent members. Is it really the case that they are imploring us – they're near begging us – to build this bridge with user fees, that they wholeheartedly support user fees in this legislation? They see it as an opportunity not just for their community, not for their region as a whole but for the province as a whole to be able to move forward with the opportunity to build infrastructure that otherwise isn't there.

Now, I understand that when the members opposite clip their speeches, they won't have my speech included, but I challenge them: give my speech, too. Give them a fair shake. I'm happy to post both my and your speeches to my page. I'm happy to have the debate that we have in this Chamber passed on to my constituents and to your constituents. I dare say there's a good number of your constituents that would think it's a bit high-minded of us in this Chamber to tell my constituents that they don't want to pay for the bridge themselves when there's no negative cost to them, nothing but a better, healthier northern Alberta for the province.

With that, Madam Chair, I'll take my seat, and I'll wait for any other members who wish to move motions or oppose the legislation that benefits my community.

The Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm happy to stand and also add my voice to the debate on Bill 43. Earlier in the week the Minister of Transportation was in the House, and he spoke very similarly to the Member for Peace River, that it's kind of a – this bill is very focused and discrete. Like, it is absolutely because the people in La Crête need this bridge at Tompkins Landing. You know, certainly, the minister spoke very strongly about: this is why this bill is written.

Yet this bill is written very broadly, and it isn't just about a bridge for the residents of La Crête. It is all encompassing. As I and many of the members on this side of the House have talked about, it covers many different types of thoroughfares so that people can be charged tolls on them. I would just submit that it doesn't need to be so all encompassing, but it is all encompassing, I think, because the UCP government wants to make this readily available for themselves, to be able to put tolls on all sorts of infrastructure. It isn't just, despite their words, unfortunately, this one place in northern Alberta that will be getting it. It does seem to be presenting that, you know, Alberta is open for business to charge Albertans to get from point A to point B.

3:40

As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood mentioned, I grew up in the Peace Country, so I have some familiarity and have certainly a lot of relatives that live in the Peace Country. My brother still lives in Valleyview with his family. I remember, you know, as a little girl, really – I'm sure this was before the member was even born. My father was a small-business man. He had a sheet metal shop, and he was journeyman in sheet metal. He would drive to Edmonton every month with his great big cube van or his truck, and

he'd take the family with him. I remember sitting – this is crazy and illegal also – in a lawn chair in the back of the van, and when dad would stop too fast, we would go flying. There were three kids in my family. Anyway, that was not a legal thing to do. Mom and dad had seats in the front, and the rest of us were just on the floor pretty much. We drove from Valleyview to Edmonton every day on that road.

He was a small-business man. You know, he struggled. He didn't really ever become hugely successful, but he had an honest living. He certainly did what he could to keep costs down, so he just drove in and got his own stuff. We went, of course, from Valleyview all the way to Edmonton, and there are many points in between. If any of those had been tolled, if he had to have that burden on him, which this bill is giving the UCP government the opportunity to put on, that would be very distressing. I can remember sort of harrowing trips up the Iosegun Hill in all sorts of weather. It was always wild. It just is not the Alberta that I would want to live in, an Alberta where people have to pay to get from point A to point B, and this bill opens it up completely to that.

I also remember – this is when I was married and I had my own kids – you know, going for a trip up in the Peace Country, going to the Queen Elizabeth provincial park, going to Tangent and taking the barge across the Peace River. It was a hoot. That was also very fun. This was also a sign that I saw that I've never seen anywhere else in the world. I remember that when we drove onto the barge to cross the Peace River, there was a sign that said: trucks with bees must be tarped. I remember thinking that was hilarious. Thank goodness, I want them to be tarped, of course, because I don't want to get stung. Of course, Falher is the honey capital of Canada.

I mean, we have so many diverse and interesting places up in the north. Certainly, I grew up in that area and have gone back many times as an adult, so I guess I just do say to the Member for Peace River that your assessment of the members on this side, me specifically, is incorrect. We don't just stay in the major cities. I feel I have a pretty comprehensive view of Alberta and certainly of that area that you are now representing, so I challenge him to not speak so derisively regarding who we are and that we have only one, you know, constituent, and it's an urban dweller. That's just not fair.

I'm concerned with what this government is doing because I would hate for Alberta to be a place where tolls become the norm and everyone, you know, just takes it as something that has to happen and that's the only way you're going to get infrastructure built in this province. Again, it's sort of hurting the average Albertan.

I do have an amendment that I would like to put forward at this time, Madam Chair. I just said that I have an amendment.

The Chair: Yes. I need a copy of it.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes, I know.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3.

Hon. member, just note that you're moving on behalf of another member.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am moving this amendment on behalf of the MLA for Edmonton-South, that Bill 43, Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act, be amended in section 4 as follows: (a) by renumbering section 4 as section 4(1), (b) in subsection (1)(b) by striking out "to establish" and substituting

“subject to subsection (2), to establish”, and then (c) by adding the following immediately after subsection (1):

- (2) The Minister may not authorize a person to establish, charge, collect or enforce a toll or fee, as referred to in clause (1)(b), in an amount that exceeds
 - (a) in the case of a toll or fee relating to the use of a personal vehicle, \$20, or
 - (b) in the case of a toll or fee relating to the use of a commercial vehicle, \$150.

This is kind of making a bad situation better. It's still not exactly what we want, but we wanted to offer the government a way to make sure that, you know, people are not gouged by these tolls and that there is a limit on how much the fee can go to. Certainly, the price of a toll is important to Albertans, people like my father, who has travelled a lot across the province. Many other people do that, too. We want to make sure that they're not going to be having one toll pile up on the other, and then there's a tremendous amount of costs for them.

Putting this cap on tolls, you know, will protect Albertans. I think it's a reasonable level that we've put, with \$20 for personal vehicles and \$150 for commercial vehicles. These prices actually came from the opening speech from the Minister of Transportation. We listened to what the minister said. We just want him to put it in black and white in the bill. This amendment actually gives the UCP government the opportunity to do this.

These are from your own words. We listened to what you said. We're trying to be helpful so that you are also fulfilling on something that you said publicly and in this Chamber regarding what's reasonable in terms of the caps on tolls. By placing these limits in the legislation, that'll protect Albertans from unjustly high tolls being imposed and ensure certainty and transparency in regard to the government's intent to reclaim the cost of infrastructure in a way that is not onerous to drivers.

I just really would appreciate it if the hon. members on both sides of the House consider this amendment. I think it is a way – perhaps it's a win-win – you know, to not only have some funding to sort of more remote places, as the Member for Peace River articulately described. There are a limited number of folks, so it's hard for that project to get to the top of the heap. This might be a way to help that. But it also is respectful of the people who have to take this tolled bridge, and it will put a cap so that no one will have to pay an onerous amount to do that.

I just, I guess, ask all the members to consider this amendment. Again, it was certainly the Minister of Transportation's own words that sort of, you know, were the creation of that, so I ask you to look at that.

With that, I'll take my seat.

3:50

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, or Madam Chair, I guess, as it were, since we're in Committee of the Whole. I really appreciate the amendment being brought forward. I'm kind of new here in the sense of understanding where the acts go, regulations, et cetera, but what I'm seeing is a couple of things. Even though the hon. member was citing that now they're in agreement with the bill only if we put this amendment forth and all of a sudden everything they've said in the last couple of days gets washed away and this is the way to do it, I would propose that even though the minister may have mentioned these dollars and cents, it is more suited to be in the actual regulations given the structures he may be building, given the timelines, and given the durations of these projects.

I also find it very rich that the opposition is talking about infrastructure projects and the need for them and unduly putting burdens on taxpayers. Well, the burden that was put on taxpayers was the fact that they couldn't have this infrastructure, a lot of it, in these places simply because the resources that we have at our disposal aren't there anymore, the wealth generation, et cetera. Folks, when will it sink in? You ran us into the darn ground. We're hovering somewhere between Great Depression and major recession. We've got a ton of infrastructure spend right now. Sure, capital is cheap, and we're trying to deploy it where we can most appropriately.

I might look over at my constituency and highway 60 as an example. Folks in my constituency out in Acheson, that is right on the border of Edmonton, or, rather, Edmonton is right on the border of us, a major logistics corridor in that area – because of what you did in that area and that region of shutting down prematurely those coal mines, 750 people driven out, the county of Parkland lost 25 per cent of their revenue coming through. One of the things they worked their tails off on, Madam Chair, was to come back and build up that area, to build up the Acheson industrial park to try to make up for those shortfalls. The biggest thing that they needed was the widening and expansion of highway 60 and that overpass. The Acheson business community and Parkland county itself had to bring it to the former government of the day and lobby the heck out of it. What did they do before the election? They splashed up this big announcement that they were doing it, but, again, a big announcement: they never tagged any money to it in the budget. What a great surprise to find out. Our minister went and worked his back end off. I lobbied the heck out of him, and everyone else did, too. They saw the reasonableness of this.

The last group, when they were talking about capital projects, there was no way of telling what was real and what was not because they didn't have a way of evaluating them. The fact that Bill 43 is going to allow us some latitude in areas where they're asking for this growth, where they literally want this to happen, to put in tolls, is a good thing. That's what I'm understanding by this amendment. They finally understood what we've been talking about here for the last – I don't know – week.

Again, to the amendment itself. This belongs in regulation, in my opinion. I would urge members of the Assembly to vote against this amendment. I do really like the speeches that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talks about because I believe he's the only one on that side of the bench that really understands capitalism, forward-thinking business. I've got it on good faith and good understanding that he holds his own caucus on entrepreneurship, and he might be the only member on that side that actually does it.

Again, when we're talking about these logistics, I talked about rail corridors and utility corridors. Not one single member of the House voted with me in favour of that this spring, but when I'm talking to folks in the Northern Transportation Advocacy Bureau up in northern Alberta and we're talking about corridors, they're excited about it. The other proposals come up: “What bridges can we build? What other roads can we tack on to it? For heaven's sake, give us a chance. If we can even put some P3-type projects or industry in place, we'll do that.”

The members, they're heckling, Madam Chair. I held my tongue with them with all the outlandish remarks they've been making forever, and they're heckling now. Again, this is how important it is to them, the rest of the province. They might sit there when the camera is on them, and they might turn like the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who's fantastic at this. She'll sit there and heckle all day long when we're actually speaking and then get up and look like – anyway. Look all prim and proper when

they're on camera for their sound bite. That's what I find the most disingenuous thing about this place.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, a point of order.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. On 23(h), (i), and (j), language that will incite disorder. The member is inaccurately representing what's happening in the House and naming another member and saying that this person is heckling, which isn't happening, and that is inciting disorder in my members as they are feeling insulted at being accused of things they are not doing. I would request that the member stick to the facts of the bill and perhaps not interpret his understanding of what our members are doing or our values or what we know about capitalism and argue the merits of this amendment. That is why I rise.

The Chair: The hon. associate minister of natural gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Listen, I'm interested by what the member has to say, but I have to say that I'm not sure what the point of order is. All you have to do is come to this Chamber during any one of the sessions and listen to the hon. members across the aisle heckling hysterically at us. There was one hon. member yesterday. It was so bad that we had to call a point of order on him. It was just so rude. The heckling is not uncommon in this Chamber. We certainly don't like to do it on this side, but on that side we get a full day of hysteria when it comes to heckling. I think the hon. member was just calling it like he sees it. If anything else, I would suggest it's a debatable point, but I would agree with them that we should turn the volume down and spend a little more time listening to one another. I hope we can do that.

The Chair: Hon. members, while what is happening is not new to debate in this Chamber, it is not debating the matter which is at hand, so while I will not find this a point of order, I will remind all members to focus on the task at hand, which is amendment A3.

The hon. member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has the floor.

Debate Continued

Mr. Getson: Yes, ma'am. Thank you. I'll make sure I don't reference what I interpret the other side to be doing while I'm speaking.

Again, back to the amendment at hand, where they're now agreeing. The opposition is now agreeing, in essence, with Bill 43, so I'm going to put that on record, that they do agree with it now. The only thing that they're looking to do is add an amendment in there, they're looking for a fee of no more than \$20 for personal vehicles or a commercial vehicle fee of \$150 to be added. Again, my point to that is that even though the minister may have said that somewhere during a speech, the intent or the essence of that, if they were going to put those fees on, they would have to look at each one of the projects themselves – the infrastructure, the toll, the length, et cetera – and that is better served in regulation. As the members opposite should know, that allows you the latitude without having to come to the House and write a bill every time you need to change a fee.

With that, I'll cede the floor to whomever wishes to follow.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this very reasonable amendment, that it appears government members have misinterpreted. The amendment introduced by my hon. colleague on behalf of another hon. colleague is addressing a very real concern around trust, around trust with this government and what they are trying to do with Bill 43.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

You see, Mr. Chair, during the election the idea of toll roads was raised very clearly through media, in the public discourse, and the government very, very clearly said that they would not use tolls to pay for infrastructure projects going forward. Now we have Bill 43, and the government is saying that it has to do with a single specific project. The members on this side of the House have expressed understanding of the unique concerns, understanding the bridge and dealing with ice roads in La Crête, but the government has chosen to bring forward legislation that is far broader than that single project. So allow us to express our disbelief that the government is credible when they say that this isn't going to be used in other major projects. In fact, the minister since then has mused about it being used in significant projects in Calgary and other places.

So there's a real issue of trust. This amendment seeks to improve this legislation. Now, the hon. member across the way seemed to imply that by introducing an amendment, that changes whether the opposition supports or does not support. That's how legislation works. As we seek to improve it, our opinions on a piece of legislation may change. In this case the government has argued that they need to be able to toll for this project. Great. The government has argued: for this project, here are the factors and the costs that will be involved. The minister even talked about the toll amounts in his remarks. Great. The opposition is simply asking the government to walk the talk, put that limitation in black and white because we have a real issue with credibility at this point in the debate.

This bill allows them to toll new infrastructure. It includes specific language for tolling of highways. It allows for tolling of all sorts of types of infrastructure. It is not a bill that is about a single project. The government continuously tries to talk about it as if it is for a single project. It is not, and hence we have our credibility issue.

4:00

Now, the reason that this amendment is so helpful and so important is because it puts a cap on the amount that could potentially be charged in tolls, a cap that will allow the single project the government wants to talk about to exist but will prevent some of the disastrous toll stories that we've heard from other jurisdictions. You can google it. In Toronto we've seen collection agencies chasing after people for \$43,000 in tolls, interest, and special penalties, \$30,000 for someone who hadn't used something in a decade. We have seen toll roads go bad.

We would like to put some reasonable limitations. We have gone to the minister's remarks to get the guidance for what would be reasonable here, and yes, we are putting it in legislation because of the credibility issue because the government said something very clear in the election, and now they've introduced legislation that does something very different, far more broad, could be applied in a number of scenarios. I would remind this government that they are the government of the day. They will not be the government forever, and the legislation they have put in is enabling for all future governments to start applying tolls.

Let's walk the talk. Let's do what we say that we are going to do, and in this case, let's curtail this legislation to those reasonable

limits that still allow the very important project in La Crête to proceed. I would support this amendment. I think making sure that there is a cap is really important when we're talking about Albertans' pocketbooks, when we're talking about what it will cost them to travel around this great province, and when we consider tolls being applied to other projects outside of the one that the government wants to talk about because, again, that's what this legislation allows them to do. Any new infrastructure, highways, the Deerfoot: the debate around this has been very, very clear.

So I certainly support the amendment introduced by my hon. colleague. I think placing these limits in legislation will protect Albertans. It will mean future governments will need to bring that back in here for debate in order to increase tolls. That type of consumer protection strikes me as something this government should be able to support, and it's concerning to me that they are so obviously uninterested in being collared in the use of Bill 43 going forward.

With that, I will simply conclude my remarks by saying that I am in favour of this amendment, and I think that it's quite reasonable. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to A3? I'll recognize the Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to address some of the comments made by my hon. friend and colleague across the way from Edmonton-Mill Woods. The primary thrust of the argument is one of trust. What do we have to trust the government that it won't be abused and used in inappropriate ways? I think I want to turn that argument on its head. The trust here is with the members opposite and the arguments that they take.

When the government announced that consultations were happening in my communities surrounding the possibility of Bill 43 and a user-fee bridge in my constituency, they used the exact same talking points then as they did now. They have no desire to change or modify or have an open mind when consultation began. This consultation happened, Mr. Chair. Members opposite say or are screaming: why was there no consultation? I refer them to their own talking points and press releases at the time, when consultation was going on, and now that we're in a spot where we're looking at being able to approve this legislation so that my community can benefit, that other communities across the province can benefit, they want to hamstring us in and say that there is no ability for us to be able to do projects unless it fits exactly in these same parameters that the project in my constituency fits within. Well, that's unfair to the other communities if they want to do a similar project.

I think the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is right in saying that regulation is the right spot to be putting these kinds of limitations in, and that's where they are going to go, particularly for my own constituency when it comes to the bridge at Tompkins Landing.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about disastrous horror stories. Well, I can tell you about some disastrous horror stories. The truth is that in my constituency if there's a young mother, as there are many, wanting to give birth as the due date is approaching and they live in the Blue Hills area, the Tompkins Landing area, it takes 45 minutes to get from that location to the hospital in High Level, where you can deal with complications in birth. The truth is that maternal health care is a very large concern for rural Albertans who live especially in remote areas. It's no laughing matter. It's no matter, as the member opposite earlier put,

of the hoot or the fun it was to cross on a ferry or a barge. It is not a hoot for my constituents that are afraid of losing their life or their child's life as they're giving birth. It is life and death, and those deaths have happened, Madam Chair. Individuals have died because they have not gotten, after complications happened, to the health centre in High Level on time. That's 45 minutes when the ice bridge is in, 45 minutes if you're not waiting for the ferry. It's two hours and 15 minutes to go around, two hours and 15 minutes.

The question was offered by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods of what it will cost Albertans to travel across this great province, quote, unquote. I offer you, Madam Chair, that it can cost my constituents their lives without this legislation in dramatic, tragic, and rare circumstances. If I am serious on this, it is because it is a serious matter. This legislation allows my community to have access to health care. So much for the theory that the NDP is the party of health care. It doesn't seem like it in this situation. It seems like the opposite is true. It seems like the local representative is listening to the constituents' needs with dispassion and a nonpartisan perspective, instead looking at their needs and interests. I'm proud to do so. I'll continue to do so. I'll graciously confront any opponent to this legislation, any attempt to slow it down in the Legislature, any attempt to try and put in law what should be in regulation in any normal circumstance because my constituents badly need this. They're asking for it.

I can go over all the economic arguments. I have in past speeches, Madam Chair. I can go over the fact that it's of zero cost to this government. I can go over the fact that the opposition is playing wedge politics with ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary instead of worrying about the constituents of rural Alberta that we represent. But I'm not doing that in this speech. In this speech I'm speaking directly to the mothers who have lost babies before they were born or in childbirth. I'm speaking directly to the mothers who themselves have had tragic harm because of lack of access to health care.

This doesn't serve all those problems, Madam Chair, but it does make it better. It makes it better for my constituents. Please, this piece of legislation is important. This amendment A3 proposed is an attempt to slow it down and work backwards on it. It's games, it's brinkmanship, pushing us to the edge here rather than looking at a collaborative solution. If these are desired proposals, then the petition is to the minister to include in regulation, rightfully so, for the project in my constituency, not true for potential future projects necessarily.

Madam Chair, contrary to it being a hoot to cross a barge, it is for some, tragically, in this province a life-and-death question of maternal health care. I ask members again to stop repeating rote talking points, if that's all they have on their desk, to please not rise on the issue and instead rise on the issue with sincere contribution considering my constituents' desires.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A3 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 43, in Committee of the Whole. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton . . .

Mr. Nielsen: Decore.

The Chair: Decore. Sorry.

Mr. Nielsen: No, you got it. Absolutely perfect, Madam Chair. No worries whatsoever there.

A pleasure to rise this afternoon, getting an opportunity to speak to Bill 43, Financing Alberta's Strategic Transportation Act. This is my first opportunity to be able to rise on this bill. I will assure the hon. member that just spoke that I will not go to any talking points. As a matter of fact, I will stick with exactly what is in this bill.

4:10

Now, as we know, this bill was initially introduced as a means with which to be able to speed up construction through additional financing for a much-needed bridge, is my understanding. It sounds like not only much needed but well overdue and probably, you know, should have happened long, long ago. But the reality is that we are here now. When I look at the language presented in the bill – here I am going back to my roots – what does the language say in the bill? Since it's introduced to us as a way to construct this bridge, I can't help but look at all the language that talks about a bridge. To be honest, when I went through the bill, I saw the word "bridge" mentioned I think it was three times. I can't find the third one. I thought I made a mark for that. Yet I saw the word "highway" mentioned – well, quite honestly, I stopped counting after 12 times. Are we talking about a bridge, or are we talking about a bridge and something else? It looks like highways to me. Okay.

Some of my first concerns, starting right out on page 2 of the bill in the preamble – and I specifically decided to focus in on the fourth "whereas," the sixth "whereas," and the eighth one because they all contain the exact same word. The fourth one says, "Existing highway infrastructure should not be considered for designation as toll highways, unless expansion that creates new infrastructure is planned to occur." In my time in the labour movement we, obviously, continue to have this debate about what a word means. "Should" means that you should not be considering; it doesn't say that you won't consider it. So that is a problem.

When I look at the sixth one, "Albertans should be engaged prior to the designation of a highway as a toll highway," they should be engaged, but there's no clear, set rule that they must be engaged. That's very, very critical. Albertans must be engaged. I've heard this over and over from members opposite: the consultation level that they've done; Albertans deserve to be involved in the decision of the province.

Of course, focusing in on the eighth "whereas": "Revenue collected on a toll highway should only be used to finance that toll highway and related costs, and tolling should" – there's that word again. I didn't even underline that. How about that? I missed that one – "stop once capital costs have been recovered." That's not a mandate to actually do that. You should do it, but you don't have to do it.

Like I've always said before, when we're creating language, it's not necessarily for those of us that are here right now. We know what's going on. We know how the debate proceeded. We know, supposedly, what the intention was. But if you look at this, well, revenue on a toll highway should only be used: that could be interpreted as saying, "Well, I can take that toll, and I can go – I know – pay for more war rooms," quite honestly, because there is no mandate to do that.

Of course, as I'd mentioned earlier, if this indeed was to be about a bridge – and like my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I would like to see this bridge built starting tomorrow. Let's get it done for these folks. They deserve it. They should not be travelling two and a half hours to try to get to their destination. But the language that's provided for in Bill 43 allows for tolling of highway projects anywhere else in the province. That was not what supposedly was the original intention of this bill. It was to enable

the faster construction, the sooner construction of this much-needed bridge. So the language does not line up with the intention, and that is a constant problem I keep identifying when I see legislation brought forward by the government. Like other amendments before, we're trying to create some certainty. We're trying to create a more solid base with which to line up with the intention.

Madam Chair, I do have an amendment to Bill 43 that I'd like to bring forward. The original is on the top, and I will wait for your instructions to proceed.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A4. I'd just note that this is a two-page amendment.

Hon. member, you may summarize this amendment as it is so long.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was hoping you might be able to suggest that to me, but had you not, I was fully prepared to read the entire thing.

This amendment provides Albertans the opportunity with which to make a decision about policy that the government is going to bring forward. I believe we've seen a lot of legislation that we're currently debating around referendums. We know that this is a very big topic for members of the government bench and government caucus. This is a very important thing that they believe Albertans should be able to exercise. Because the language in Bill 43 does not refer only to a bridge but to highways across the entirety of the province of Alberta, Albertans should have the opportunity to have their say should there be, as an example, an expanded roadway between Edmonton and Calgary or maybe Calgary and Lethbridge which to put a toll on according to what we have presented in Bill 43.

If indeed the government is true to what it's saying and their conviction around whether Albertans should have access to referendums and be able to have a say on things – I mean, we heard in the past that Albertans should have had a say on the carbon levy, that they should have had their chance to voice their opinions. Okay. If you're true to that, then they should have the ability to voice their opinions with regard to tolls being put not only on bridges but on highways, too.

I would definitely urge members of this House to give this amendment very serious consideration and make this bill somewhat clearer and allow Albertans to voice their opinion as to whether they want tolls or not on their highways. I can completely appreciate the members' constituents being willing to pay those expenses. I still kind of feel like it was: well, if we want the bridge, we're going to have to kind of take that on. But everybody gets the opportunity to weigh that and how that will work for them best. That was the decision that those residents made – I'm behind that; I appreciate that – but the rest of Albertans should get the opportunity to voice whether tolls are put on highways as what's proposed in the language of Bill 43.

I look forward to the continued debate, especially on this amendment. I may have more to say.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River on amendment A4.
4:20

Mr. Williams: I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak again on behalf of my constituents, Madam Chair. I thank the member opposite for his speech though I do think it's a tragedy that he stopped at the 12th mention of highway, because had he gotten to the 14th, he would have read this under Definitions, again not a talking point, sticking to the facts:

- (d) "highway" means land that is authorized to be used or surveyed for use as a public highway and includes any

bridges forming part of a highway and any structure incidental to the public highway.

Well, that, Madam Chair, just sort of blows a bit of the argument right out of the water. The question was: well, it's talking about highways and not bridges, so this must be about highways and not bridges. But bridges are defined inside highways for all 12 of those mentions that we saw. It's either highway infrastructure or toll highway for all mentions of the first 12 in the act. I'm very happy to enlighten the member and encourage him to continue reading past the 12th mention of "highway" in the entire act. In doing so, I think we'll have, despite this still being productive, an even more productive debate.

The legislation proposed I think is thoughtful, reasonable, supported, and the motion put forward for an amendment by the member opposite I think is completely out of line with the legislation and the concept of a toll bridge. The truth is that my constituents will vote with their steering wheels. They can take the bridge and pay the fee, or they can not. It is up to them. Without them using that bridge, it will not be sustainable. If they continue to use it, especially industry, it will be sustainable.

The idea of a referendum, where folks potentially in Edmonton and Calgary get to decide, again, whether or not folks in the far north regions of the province need to commute over an ice bridge or not I think is maybe, one, a bit of an inappropriate use of a referendum and, two, maybe a little bit of an extension of what we're seeing here, where folks who don't understand the realities of a life that we live day to day are trying to impose on us, tell us what's good for us. Now, I have no desire to do that to the members in their constituencies. If those members desire to make user-fee infrastructure a part of their daily commute, I implore them: ask the minister, start getting letters from the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce or the Calgary Chamber of commerce, and make the case if you want that.

I know what I want in my constituency on behalf of my constituents. It's a toll bridge at Tompkins Landing so that we don't have to go over an ice bridge. I remind the members again: this is not *Ice Road Truckers* on History television. This is day-to-day life for my constituents, an economic and sometimes, tragically, as I mentioned, health reality for expectant mothers and others who have health concerns and need immediate access to health care.

I think it is abundantly clear that what we see here is not an interest in supporting the bridge – though I am grateful for the members opposite all making their comments in support of the bridge, something that I do not think we had from members earlier on the opposition benches but that we see in spades now, and I chalk that up to the arguments that my constituents are pushing me to make on their behalf here in the Chamber, the arguments that the chamber of commerce makes, that the residents in Blue Hills, in Paddle Prairie, in La Crête, in Blumenort and others make for access to the rest of the province through this proposed infrastructure project.

With that, Madam Chair, I won't detain the members opposite, and I'm encouraged that we're seeing progress with them at least supporting the bridge. Now let's support the bill that makes the bridge happen.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise on the amendment that's been put before us by the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I've listened throughout the afternoon to the arguments that have been made by both sides of the House. You

know, I first would like to point out, once again, that the idea of tolling important infrastructure like bridges and like highways, as would be enabled through this legislation, is not something that was in the UCP's campaign platform. So it's interesting to see them backpedal on that, especially in the context that we have of this UCP government defunding in many ways our very important municipalities across the province, whether it be their police funding, in which we've seen this UCP government take more money away from municipalities in terms of infractions or tickets that are levied by police across the province. We see this government taking more money than traditionally on that side of things.

We see proposed changes that were going to move forward – I think that maybe this government has put a pause on that at this point – that infrastructure projects or energy infrastructure projects would be taxed less, which would have major implications for municipalities across the province. Now we end up here, where we have this government telling Albertans that, you know, they haven't done a good enough job with the taxes that they already collect from Albertans and that they now need more to provide important infrastructure like the bridge that's been talked about so often throughout this legislative session in La Crête.

I appreciate, once again, that we all support this bridge in different ways, I would say. On the UCP side they say that Albertans should be taxed twice for access to that bridge. Not only are they collecting taxes already, but they think that they need to collect even more from Albertans who should be able to use that bridge. It's in contrast to what we've been saying whereas we also support this bridge, but we don't think that the Albertans in those communities should be taxed twice or 10 times, for that matter, as they try to access this important infrastructure.

I think back, once again, to important points that the government side has made about Albertans on one side of the bridge needing to get to medical facilities on the other side, and it makes me even more concerned about the idea that we have Albertans who are going to have to consider whether they can afford to take the shortcut as they have medical emergencies, Albertans who might work as medical staff at these health care facilities, who will now have to make a decision whether they can afford to pay every day or weekly or monthly to get to their job in a timely manner instead of having to take the more lengthy, more dangerous travelling options. It, once again, takes me back to the fact that when we create government policy, it should be with a lens of understanding how it's going to affect all Albertans or the universality of it and how we have certain Albertans who will be able to better afford access to this important infrastructure and that we'll have other Albertans who are not able to afford that.

It's very concerning to me, once again, that we have this UCP government telling Albertans that if they make enough money, they'll be able to take these shortcuts, and if not, well, they're just out of luck, and they will have to continue with the more lengthy process of transportation. It's very concerning not only in this option of the toll road for La Crête or the toll bridge that this UCP government is proposing but also in the comments of previous members in the opposition on concerns about highways in Calgary or highways in Edmonton and across the province that this government has not ruled out and has actually enabled to be tolled through this legislation.

You know, even further, we had the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland rise and say that Acheson might be a perfect example – I'm paraphrasing – of where we need another toll road to afford important infrastructure for the businesses and the people who work in those communities. I would be interested to find out if that is official policy of this UCP. Even further to that point, that member

rose and said on the previous amendment: “Well, the Minister of Transportation stood up and said, you know, that we imagine it will cost \$150 for business transportation and \$20 for private-class transportation. But even though the Transportation minister stood up and said that in the Legislature, we shouldn’t take that at face value. Those figures might change.” I would beg: why did the minister say that in the first place? If Albertans are trying to decide on whether they support Bill 43, the Financing Alberta’s Strategic Transportation Act, why would the minister stand up and say something that his other members are now contradicting or saying: “That might not be the case. It might be more expensive. We’ll have to wait and see in the regulations”? So I would appreciate it if the minister chose not to say things that he did not have the authority to say in the first place or if he was not willing to commit to that or have the proper information to commit to it in the first place.

With that being said, the amendment before us, that these important decisions should go to a referendum – the government has spoken at length about how democratic they believe referendums to be, and when we are talking about important infrastructure investments for the public good of our province, no doubt it should be considered by relevant stakeholders in a referendum.

With that, once again, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to this important amendment. I thank the Member for Edmonton-Decore for bringing it forward, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

4:30

The Chair: Any members on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I’ll keep my comments fairly brief. I’m rising in support of the amendment that my colleague brought forward. As far as, you know, the government, if they do want to bring forward other pieces of – if they do want to put tolls on new pieces of infrastructure, the people that will be impacted by it will, at least, get a say and get a vote. Now, we know that this government time and time again has talked favourably about referendums, the use of referendums. In fact, I imagine that Albertans will be facing a number of them in the coming months and years, and I think Albertans deserve to have their voices heard.

Now, I appreciate that the Member for Peace River spoke about the overwhelming support of this bridge up at Tompkins Landing and that the people there have spoken in favour of it. If they don’t have a choice, if the choice is that the only way to get a bridge is to pay a toll, then they’ve agreed to that. I appreciate that. Would a referendum be necessary in that one example? Probably not. But I do think it would be fascinating, for example, and I’m only using – I mean, you know, the Member for Peace River spoke about how we’re talking often about Edmonton and Calgary. Well, I mean, I am an MLA in Edmonton although, again, I take pride in representing Albertans throughout the province.

The example of the Deerfoot comes from the Minister of Transportation himself, who had spoken at a press conference talking about that if the Deerfoot was expanded, it would probably only ever be done via toll. Now, again, I appreciate that the bill talks about new infrastructure, but if the Deerfoot does get a new lane, then I believe that would be deemed a new infrastructure, and therefore the minister could put a toll on it. I think it would be fascinating to have a referendum for the people of Calgary to see what they think of that idea, if they actually do support having to pay a toll to drive on the Deerfoot. I’d love to know what the

Calgary Chamber thinks about that. I’d love to know what businesses in Calgary think about that, especially transportation businesses that move goods throughout the province, having to incur an additional fee. I think that those businesses would argue that they pay their share in taxes and that infrastructure is something that governments should be investing in, not going back to Albertans and double-dipping or triple-dipping to get funding for it.

You know, a great example, again, is the Deerfoot. I mean, this is a major artery for the city of Calgary and also for outlying areas, and of course it is the corridor that joins not only Edmonton and Red Deer but much of the province together and also is our connection down through to the U.S. There’s a significant impact, I think. This amendment is an interesting amendment that my colleague brought forward in order to hear from the people of the province before the government makes a decision on whether or not to just build a piece of infrastructure or to toll it.

For those reasons, I encourage members to support this amendment, and let’s let Albertans decide because what’s critical to this – two points. One, this was not in the UCP platform. In fact, the leader of the UCP, the current Premier, gave his word and promised that tolls were not part of the platform. In fact, he even went so far as to mock the opposition, to make outrageous claims about how we were fearmongering when, in fact – I mean, I think there’s some egg on his face – here it is in black and white, a piece of legislation that does exactly what he promised he would not introduce. You know, if the government wants to be beholden to the voters of this province, then let them have a say. Every time that the government plans to bring in a new piece of infrastructure and slap a toll on it, let’s hear from the Albertans that will be mostly affected by that as far as if they want a referendum.

The other point that I’ll make and why I think that this amendment is really good is that, again, this bill is an example of this government bringing in additional fees on Albertans, a government that claims that they stand on the side of taxpayers, yet they are nickel and diming Albertans at every turn. I think it’s, you know, a shame. But it’s telling of how the government actually views taxpayers and the people of this province. Let’s let the people of Alberta have their say.

I think a great example – I know a colleague that’s sitting near to me is the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. If a new highway was – or let’s just say that highway 880 was being twinned.

Mr. Yao: Highway 881.

Mr. Bilous: Highway 881. Pardon me. Again, this bill would allow the government to slap a toll on that. Now, I know that 881 needs to be twinned in the fact that what it would do is take a lot of pressure off of highway 63 as far as personal and passenger traffic. We know that many examples of fatalities occur because large pieces of machinery move on highway 63. Of course, people can be impatient and make sometimes unfortunate decisions.

I think that the people of this province – the government would find that people are not supportive in most circumstances of paying an additional fee in order to have infrastructure. Again, I’m not talking about Peace River. We know that example of the member. We’ve talked about it at length. Again, if this bill only dealt with that piece of infrastructure, we’d be supporting it. The fact of the matter is that this gives the government carte blanche to introduce at will any new piece of infrastructure, whether bridges or highways, to toll them. This amendment would at least force the government to go to those most impacted by this decision and to hear from them directly. I think the government would hear loud

and clear how Albertans feel about having to pay additionally for infrastructure that is the responsibility of government.

For those reasons, I encourage all members to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? I see the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Okay. I'll be brief here. Let me say just a couple of things that were said. The opposition are really making the best case for the bill unamended because whenever they talk against it, they're always using words that are actually in the bill.

Let me say here that some of the other things they said is that we'd never had a toll road. No, actually, during the last election the Leader of the Opposition, then the Premier, came out publicly and said that the UCP would toll every road in Alberta. Now, if that's not the exact quote, that's pretty close to what the then Premier said, now the Leader of the Opposition. Our Premier said, "That's ridiculous," which it is.

Of course, this piece of legislation is completely consistent with that because it doesn't allow us to do that. It actually says that you have to do public consultation. There has to be a nontoll alternative. It can only be on new or expanded infrastructure. You can only collect the money to pay for that particular road. You can never go into general revenue. Somebody said also that it wasn't in our campaign, but on page 29 of our platform it said somewhere in there, "use alternative financing . . . when there is a solid business case and value for money can be achieved for taxpayers," which is exactly what this is. It was in our platform. The NDP may want to deny it. The facts are inconvenient for them because they happen to be dead wrong.

4:40

I would say to that that there will be a referendum on this. It'll happen two years from now, and the Member for Peace River will, I'm sure, get re-elected with a resounding majority if the folks up there like the fact that he's supporting a toll bridge up there, and I'm sure that somebody else will. I'm pretty sure at this point it won't be an NDP member that they pick up there at that referendum a couple of years from now.

There. There it is. I could go on longer, but suffice it to say that the arguments that the NDP are making against this legislation and for this particular amendment do not hold water.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A4 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 43, in Committee of the Whole. I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Madam Chair, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 43.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 48

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

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

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 48. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to move an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies, with the original on top for you. I'll just wait until you tell me.

The Chair: Is that the original?

Mrs. Allard: That's the original, yeah. I had it marked there.

The Chair: Terrible ink choice.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. minister, please proceed.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and move an amendment to Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). I propose to amend the bill as follows. In section 19 – I'll just read this – by striking out "judicial review, leave to appeal, appeal of a Tribunal's decision or order" and substituting the following: "judicial review of or leave to appeal a decision or order of the Tribunal or on an appeal of a decision or order of the Tribunal."

I'll explain a little bit. Section 19 of the land and property rights tribunal act sets out the standard for review for appeals, leaves to appeal, and judicial reviews of orders and decisions of the tribunal. This proposed amendment clarifies the distinction between applying for a judicial review or leave to appeal a decision or order versus simply appealing a decision or order. As well, the current wording refers to "a" tribunal when it would be more accurate to say "the" tribunal. This is corrected in the proposed amendment. These are minor technical changes proposed to ensure greater accuracy and clarity, and I would ask for the support of all members of the Assembly.

With that, Madam Chair, I will conclude my motion of the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A2? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak again to Bill 48 and, of course, more specifically to the amendment. I think you said that it was A2?

The Chair: A2.

Mr. Nielsen: A3? Okay. There we go.

The Chair: No, no. A2.

Mr. Nielsen: Oh, I was right the first time. Okay. Excellent. Yeah. Just trying to keep all the numbers straight here so that I'm not talking about, you know, possibly some other bill here this evening.

I do appreciate the Minister of Municipal Affairs bringing forward an amendment to, I believe, improve accuracy and clarity around that section. I guess I find myself wondering a little bit. I mean, what we're talking about here are changes to the MGA, the Municipal Government Act, quite substantially, you know, around reserve lands, things like that, judicial review and things like that. I'm wondering why this section wasn't handled by your ministry instead of the red tape reduction ministry. Obviously, to potentially miss some of the language, for which you're bringing an amendment forward here, I can't help but wonder that it should

have been handled separately by Municipal Affairs and not the red tape reduction ministry.

When we're talking about the substantial changes that are made within Bill 48, you know, we see a lot of different things that are being added in here. I mean, 12 to 14 changes going across eight different ministries of the government, which – as I've always said before, Madam Chair, this is what's considered omnibus legislation, something that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was firmly against. It's my understanding, from the previous debate, that the minister was trying to maybe explain a little bit of a different position about omnibus legislation. However you want to necessarily define it, it's still omnibus legislation. Was the associate minister of red tape really in favour of omnibus legislation, or is he not?

It still seems like there are a lot of changes encompassing Bill 48 that really aren't red tape reduction. You know, one of the first ones I think of is around the changes to the Alberta centennial medal. The whole premise of the red tape reduction ministry, when it was formed, was to reduce red tape so that job creators can then go out and create jobs. I have to ask: how many jobs got created out of proposing to get rid of the Alberta Centennial Medal Act, just as one example? Again, we have a bill that seems to contain a bunch of fluff but is trying to wrap significant changes around the MGA, which, you know, the Municipal Affairs minister, I think, should have been leading on.

Now, I know that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has reached out to different municipalities. I've certainly tried to reach out to a few as well, but considering that my riding of Edmonton-Decore is located in Edmonton, it made sense, of course, to very quickly reach out to Edmonton. What I ended up finding out was that the city of Edmonton is, of course, very, very focused right now on a housing strategy, essentially, to eliminate homelessness within the city of Edmonton. I'm sure that, you know, Calgary and Red Deer and everywhere else is also on that. When we're talking about changes around reserved land, I'm concerned that developers could then go to the province to, essentially, get a ruling from the province to be able to go in and develop these reserved lands that might be getting earmarked for some of this housing. Again, I see this attempt to step on the toes of the municipal leaders that are the ones that deal right front and centre with Albertans each and every day.

4:50

Perhaps the minister will get an opportunity to jump up and maybe add some comments around why it was decided that these changes in the MGA should be led by the red tape reduction ministry, only to find out that we now have to make an amendment to it, which, I suppose I should have clarified right from the very beginning, I don't think is a bad amendment. I think this is a good amendment. Certainly, if we've got language that's not making sense or it's going to cloud the process or potentially even bog it down and stop it, that's the last thing that we want to do. If that is indeed the case, just getting a first glance at it, I believe that this will be a good amendment to a bill, but I still do believe that that section, given the scope and all of the different moving parts around it with municipalities, should not have been brought forward by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

While I certainly, as I said, will support this amendment – again, I've only briefly seen it, but from what I can tell, you know, if it does exactly what I believe it is, this is a good change. It will clear up the process. It will make it a little bit more accurate in its language, of course, which I constantly get hung up on, the language in a bill. Hopefully, maybe we'll be able to talk about some other amendments to Bill 48 later on here in Committee of the Whole with which to also try to maybe look at clearing some things

up, making it a little bit more straightforward, and try to allow Albertans to see that there really is some red tape reduction that will benefit them.

When I see things like the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry claiming about the red tape that they reduced by not charging \$5 to still fill out the permit to go and harvest Christmas trees and firewood and whatnot, I'm sorry to say that that's not red tape reduction. People are still having to fill out the permit; they're just not paying to have to do that. Perhaps the red tape minister would be better served by looking at ways to identify better pieces of red tape and perhaps should've left the changes around the MGA within the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, where it belongs and where I think the technical expertise resides to make these changes and probably with better consultation with the municipal governments. Like I said, with Edmonton very focused on housing, I don't know if they're necessarily focused on this type of change, which could affect their decisions around land use very, very significantly.

Again, I will support amendment A2, and I would certainly urge members of the House to also support this change.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to rise and respond to a couple of the questions. I think there were some great questions in the previous member's comments, and I will start with – as members of this Chamber may recall, I became the Minister of Municipal Affairs in late August, so I can't fully answer the question as to why the bill was originating in red tape versus Municipal Affairs because it was under way when I landed in the portfolio. However, I too asked that question, so I think it's a valid question. I appreciate the member's support of the amendment.

I also just wanted to address a couple of the substantive questions with respect to the changes to the MGA in Bill 48, particularly around land reserves. This was a change that was proposed by Municipal Affairs, and the expertise of Municipal Affairs was used in consultation with municipalities across the province. I also have personally taken great interest in ensuring that we're not doing anything that will surprise municipalities. I've also briefed my critic, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and I'm proud of the working relationship that he and I have developed in the short time I've been the minister – was pleased to do that.

With respect to the reserve land itself this was actually a provision in the MGA that was rarely used, as a matter of fact, I think in the last 20 years it has not been used at all. Part of the reason for that is just the practicality, that by the time the development is under way, this reserve land could be added, and it was impractical in reality to add the reserve land when the development was already mostly completed. That was part of the rationale for this. This is a piece of legislation that actually hasn't been functional or used, and there may be other mechanisms to allow for alternative reserve options that would be more nimble and more responsive in real time to actually develop the community in accordance with the municipal direction and the overall regional plan.

I hope that that answers some of the concerns from the member. I appreciate his support of the amendment.

With that, I will close my remarks. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A2 as moved by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 48. Any members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. It is an honour to rise today in this House and speak to Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020, No. 2. Alberta's government was elected on a mandate to reduce red tape and remove unnecessary burdens for businesses and for families here in Alberta. As we navigate through our economic recovery, reducing red tape will be essential in stimulating the economy and making life better for all Albertans.

In this bill you will, Madam Chair, see changes proposed by Albertans that were received through the red tape reduction portal as well as the ongoing work of all of my colleagues, including the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. Among many insightful suggestions these submissions highlighted how we can make the adoption process easier for families. The decision to adopt a child into one's home makes all the difference for children in need and for couples and families who want nothing more than to raise children of their own.

Back in May 2019 those of us here in this place passed Motion 501, which urged "the government to take all necessary measures to make the process for all forms of adoption more efficient and timely for families." This was a motion brought forward by our colleague the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, and I am always so impressed by his passion and advocacy for this topic. I think it's something that we all agree on here in this House.

Madam Chair, this motion coupled with red tape reduction submissions inspired a large-scale review of all of our adoption policies and the legislation, the regulations, and the policies surrounding this really important topic. This review did in fact reveal many difficulties that exist in our current legislation that are really restrictive, specifically when we're talking about the postadoption information disclosure. The proposed changes in this legislation will eliminate barriers for adult adoptees trying to reconnect with their families and, really, their histories. Our comprehensive review of the adoption process has allowed us to look at the regulations and policies as well, and I know that while that's not necessarily part of this bill, I think it's really important to address all of those changes that we're making at this time.

The amendments will increase accountability for adoption agencies and efficiency in programs and processes. It will provide prospective adoptive parents with more online tools and give them an opportunity to share their own profiles online.

I have heard some questions, some members in this House wondering, Madam Chair, if these changes have any real impact or if they will make a difference for families. The need for changes was made very clear to me through this feedback from these families and those who have travelled this often long and arduous path. I could continue to talk about things that we've heard a lot about – red tape, barriers, processes – but this afternoon I really want to talk about people.

Currently those people who were adopted prior to 2005 often, Madam Chair, have a really hard time accessing their own biological information because there are two sets of rules, one for adoptions pre-2005 and one for adoptions post-2005. There was a good reason for that at the time, but it really no longer makes sense.

5:00

So who are the people? Who are the people that this change will make a difference for? Madam Chair, these are folks like survivors of the '60s scoop, for example. They have suffered countless instances of emotional, physical, mental abuse and carry with them, as a result, considerable trauma. They are trying to find their

families, and in trying to find their families, those who are trying to find their families are also trying to find their culture, their heritage. They're trying to find their identity. Unnecessary complications, then: they are met with confusion, the runaround sometimes. And it's not on purpose. It's because there was a lot of confusion that existed in the legislation that prevented them from accessing this information, that they are rightly entitled to have.

Madam Chair, the postadoption registry can only release information to adoptees, descendants of a deceased adoptee, or a biological parent of an adoptee. This is sometimes a very difficult linear system of information distribution that doesn't work for those such as '60s scoop survivors, who have been removed from their family and their community at a very young age.

I do want to quote Laura Osgood – Laura is a '60s scoop survivor – about the changes that are included in this bill, Madam Chair. She said this:

Connecting with my father and my birth family has given me my identity, but I'm still filling in the blanks [of] my life. I've lost my language, and my heritage was taken from me. I'm a toddler in my culture. Opening access to adoption information for '60s Scoop survivors is incredibly important. Our past is part of our story. And it needs to be shared.

Madam Chair, I can't imagine what these survivors have gone through. Those words mean a lot to me. So for those who are questioning what impact these small changes have: for those who are experiencing these complications and these barriers to finding their families, their communities, their cultures, and their identity, it makes a huge difference.

Madam Chair, families across Canada are also increasingly finding ways to access these connections, whether it is Facebook or 23andMe or ancestry.com. I know that as we lead up to the holiday season, I think there are a lot of ads also for programs and services like this. Additional changes in this bill would allow for the release of identifying information to a sibling or the extended birth family. We are in some ways, when it's related to that type of information, catching up to the 21st century.

But, again, Madam Chair, this change is about more than a streamlined process. It is about people, people who have been adopted and people who have been through this process and now have hope when searching for families and connections, people like Jane Wilkinson, who knows this change had to be made and had this to say:

The knowledge that I may have a full biological sister lives inside of me. I have been searching for her for many years without success. New access to identifying information could bring me closer to the answers I have been waiting for.

Madam Chair, with these changes, we will still make sure that the privacy and safety of adoptees and biological families will continue to be protected. For those adoptions taking place prior to 2005, birth parents and adoptees were able to file a disclosure veto to prevent disclosure of personal information. With the increased demand for information, removing these vetoes will allow adoptees to gain the access they deserve and have been asking for.

Given the amount of time that has passed, many of the reasons for keeping this information sealed no longer exist. However, Madam Chair, there are still privacy provisions that will be provided to the birth parents or adoptees who do not want to be contacted or in cases where there very well may be a risk to either of those people – and there will still be six months for those wishing to veto this access to be able to do that – to reach out to all of those families to provide them the ability to file a veto and keep that information sealed, whatever that reason may be.

I know we do talk a lot about the interplay, if you will, between legislation, regulations, and policies. I do want to speak a little bit

to the changes that are also happening outside of this specific act because I think that they tie in together. Madam Chair, we do know that adoption can be a long and emotionally draining process. We want to make sure that prospective parents using adoption agencies are protected for the duration of their journey.

This spring one Alberta adoption agency closed unexpectedly. Obviously, as the Minister of Children's Services I had to make sure that the processes and requirements were followed and that we did everything we could do to protect those families, and they were. Madam Chair, they were. But I kept coming back to the people, the families, and the prospective adoptive parents who were reaching out to my office, who, you know, in many cases had been on this journey for a really long time. I can't even begin to imagine the devastation that that change caused for these families.

While we followed our policies, you know, it did occur to me that we in this House have the ability to change legislation, regulations, and policies to make sure that that doesn't happen to other families. These changes that we're making in the regulations will require adoption agencies to advise their clients within 10 days if there has been any change to a licence. If an adoption agency has a licence and there are concerns which make us at Children's Services implement a conditional licence – we all know, and we've talked about it with child care, that people aren't walking into a building and reading the licence on the wall and then trying to infer that there may be an issue – we're requiring them to provide that notice and disclose that information to families. We also want to disclose what fees are nonrefundable and what fees, in fact, are refundable so that if a family is ever in a situation like that, these adoption agencies have a very real responsibility to provide that transparency and ensure that these prospective adoptive families have that information and are aware of, really, the process that they're going through.

Anila Lee Yuen is a hopeful adoptive parent and the CEO of the Centre for Newcomers. She is a change-maker, Madam Chair, in Calgary. We've met a number of times at many cultural events. She's so passionate, and she has been very frank in sharing a lot of her experiences in going through this process. When we reached out to talk about these specific changes, she had this to say:

As prospective adoptive parents, my husband and I were disappointed in the lack of accountability with our previous adoption agency. These changes will help other adoptive families in their journey and ensure no family will have to go through what we did.

This is a regulatory change, and I truly believe this is a very important one because it will have a direct impact on this journey for prospective parents who are going through it. Madam Chair, as I've said, you know, the adoption process is often long, it's often drawn out, and it really isn't fair for families who just want to provide a child with a forever, loving home. It's also not fair to those children, who are, in fact, in need of a home.

Changes to the adoption policy will also work towards speeding up these timelines. We've heard it in this House. I've heard it from many members when we were speaking to Motion 501. Many members of this House shared either their own experiences or those that they've heard from their friends, family, or constituents. We have all heard of long timelines for home assessments and sometimes multiple home assessments and confusion about why and how long those assessments are good for. They create some additional confusion for prospective adoptive families.

Now, Madam Chair, we have to make sure that kids are going into a home that is safe, absolutely. There is no question about that. There is a reason why there is rigour to this process, and I truly do believe that. But sometimes we have duplications and, really, unclear goalposts of what that looks like. Children's Services is

working to streamline and standardize that process province-wide so that, as opposed to seeing some of the regional differences that we see, it is clear, so that timelines can be better controlled, and there is one process across the entire province of Alberta. This will increase accountability, clarify expectations, and reduce, as I said, some of those regional differences that we often see, and it will mean a more seamless process, especially for those in rural Alberta.

Madam Chair, parents do make more informed decisions when they are given the right tools, and that's why we're also piloting online preadoption training for prospective adoptive parents. This new, flexible delivery of consistent learning will be available for families all across the province so that they can be well equipped from the outset of their adoption journey.

5:10

Madam Chair, I also want to speak a little bit, again, about how this change is meaningful and that it's not just one change that we're making. November was Adoption Awareness Month, and three years after this bill was passed unanimously in this House, we did the work to make sure that Bill 206, the Child, Youth And Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017, introduced in 2017 by the now Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, was proclaimed.

Madam Chair, I am very proud of that work. I am proud to say that we did the work that was required to keep kids safe. It was something that we heard: "Why was this bill not passed? Why had it sat on the corner of a desk?" It was because there were some concerns raised about the regulations and making sure that we could in fact keep kids safe. This is aligned with our commitment to protect the most vulnerable in our province and avoid any unintended consequences that come with sharing personal information online.

We did that. I did that. I met with families. I met with adoption agencies here in Alberta. Our ministry worked very closely with them to hear what their concerns were and then, in fact, to ensure that their concerns were reflected in the regulations so that we could do this in a safe way. Especially when we talk about the importance of protecting the most vulnerable and about things like human trafficking, any time we're talking about personal profiles or information of children or families or those who are vulnerable, we have to make sure that we are doing this right.

For those going through this process, they truly believe that this will have an impact. Enacting this bill allows agencies to use technology to increase the scope of reach by allowing prospective parents to advertise their adoption profiles online. This has to be done through a licensed adoption agency. These prospective parents feel that this will better allow them to share their stories, Madam Chair. They truly feel that this change will allow them to better share their stories with birth parents in a real and genuine and authentic way, you know, as one family told me: "I don't just want to be a page in a binder. I want to be able to share my own story, myself, online." They truly believe that that will make a difference. Biological parents will be introduced to hopeful adoptive parents on an even deeper, more personal, genuine, authentic level. That will allow them to be more, as I said, than just an ad on a page.

Edie Pendleton is the executive director of Small Miracles Adoption agency, one of our three adoption agencies here in Alberta. She said this:

Couples hoping to become parents through open adoption have been asking us to find new ways to share their information with prospective birth parents who are considering making an adoption plan for their child. Allowing prospective parents to advertise their profiles online through licensed adoption agencies gives us a new way to share information with birth families – while guarding the safety and privacy of all parties.

Before I conclude, I do also want to address a question that was asked by the MLA for Edmonton-Manning regarding the process of reviewing adoption applications and changing the term “serve” to “provide.” This is an excellent question, and I think it’s a good example of how all of us in this House, I do believe – I’m looking across the aisle, and I’m seeing lots of smiles and nods and notes being written. I think we’re all really committed to making this process better for Alberta families, and the question from the Member for Edmonton-Manning is a really good one. I say that I see smiles; I see it in their eyes, you know, above the masks, Madam Chair.

Under section 66(1) as it currently reads, the minister is served with an adoption application, and the minister then has the discretion to investigate the adoption application and provide a report of the investigation to the clerk of the court. The applicant is also served with a copy of this report under 66(2).

These amendments really just reflect what’s actually taking place in practice. It’s not a real change; it just is a word that better describes that. This isn’t being served in the same way that often a court document may be. It’s often in an e-mail, and it is provided. It’s less intimidating language, I would suggest, but it’s also just really better reflective of the process that takes place in situations like this.

Madam Chair, if passed, Bill 48 will improve many aspects of the adoption process in Alberta. These changes are highly anticipated and will be very welcome by all Albertans, particularly by those who have gone through this very long journey. I want to thank all of the incredible caregivers, parents, guardians, and also those who are still prospective and hopeful parents and guardians who have provided this very real feedback and those who have provided homes to children in need.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

I also, Mr. Chair, want to thank my colleagues the MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain and the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women as well as the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction for helping me move forward on these changes. I’m so incredibly proud of the work we’ve done together to help connect more children with forever, loving homes and ensure that the adoption process is easier for prospective adoptive parents.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Any more comments, questions, or amendments to be offered on Bill 48? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise. I just want to thank the minister, you know, for her comments around the changes under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. I think what I specifically want to say is thank you for bringing forward some stories from people. At the end of the day, everything that we do in this House always has an effect on Albertans, be that positive but also the negative things that take place.

You know, the one story about back in the ’60s scoop and getting separated from families: an absolutely dark, dark place, in my opinion, in the history of Canada and why it’s so important, I think, that as a Legislature we need to take that bold step to recognize that the things that happened to indigenous peoples back then was a genocide. It’s so important. We need to step up and recognize that. But thank you for bringing those stories forward.

Of course, now, looking at the scope and how impactful these changes could be made in this section, I now kind of find myself in

the same position as I did with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. You know, why was it that something this important, with the kind of implications that are potentially involved – it seemed like it was delegated to the ministry of red tape reduction. At the end of the day, once those changes are made, the responsibility will still go back to your ministry to be able to handle, guide people through that and everything like that. But because it’s in the red tape bill, are we going to have individuals that will now start calling up the associate minister and saying: well, what’s going on in this bill? There won’t be, really, an explanation other than: well, I’ll send you to this department. You really want to try to get out of that habit of kicking people to different places if possible.

I now kind of find myself in a bit of a place where I’m trying to weigh some things out here. As I’d mentioned, I’m very concerned around the changes, the impacts that Bill 48 makes with regard to municipalities and how that now weighs against the changes you’re trying to make within the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. You know, do we put municipalities at a disadvantage when it comes to their reserve land, their ability to make those decisions that are best for their communities, or do we say: “Sorry. This is more important”? We need to make sure that, potentially, families have the ability to unite, again, the changes around adoption and making those things easier for families to be able to do.

I guess, with that, I potentially have a solution to that, where we wouldn’t be forced to possibly choose between one or the other. I do think it’s very important that municipal leaders have the ability to make those choices that they believe are in the best interest of their communities. They’re right on the front lines there at ground level, and we shouldn’t be, I think, as a province playing in their pond when you don’t see municipalities trying to overrule the province with regard to things. Hopefully, maybe we have an opportunity to not be able to do that, because, like I said, with the remarks that I heard from the Minister of Children’s Services, I’m very much excited about what this could potentially mean for families.

With that, Mr. Chair, I do have an amendment here, with the original right on top. I will await your instructions.

5:20

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, this will be amendment A3.

Mr. Nielsen: Sure. I’ll write that down properly this time so I don’t get confused, like I did the last time, as to which amendment I’m speaking to.

I doubt that I will get off the hook like I did the last time, because my last amendment was rather long. I’m assuming I’ll need to read this into the record. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo I move that Bill 48, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2), be amended in section 10 by striking out subsection (40).

Now, as we know, subsection (40) deals with the whole concept around reserve land, you know, developers being able to take the opportunity – if they, well, for all intents and purposes, Mr. Chair, don’t get the answer that they want from the municipality and its leaders, they can then go to the province and have that overruled. As we know, municipalities put aside this reserve land that could be used for things, anywhere from schools, fire halls, playgrounds, things like that, or potentially when you’re talking about more dense neighbourhoods. I think about, you know, my own neighbourhood that I live in. There’s really nowhere else to build, so if you’re trying to look for ways, possibly, to make neighbourhoods more dense, you start to potentially look at these areas, which I know my neighbourhood has.

You know, given my remarks earlier around – the city of Edmonton, I know, is very, very focused around affordable housing,

trying to end homelessness within the city of Edmonton. Any potential plans that they might have to try to create maybe some of these sites could be affected by these decisions. It's kind of, you know, the old adage of playing mom against dad: if I don't get the answer from mom, then I'll go to dad and see if I can get the answer from dad that I really want or vice versa. I know my kids used to do that to me all the time, and I always seemed to lose on that one. I would say yes, and then mom would say no, and, you know: but dad said. And it was just chaos. We definitely don't want to be getting into those situations.

I know that we've seen a situation where this really hasn't been exercised before in the past, but to me, getting all hung up on language and things like that, by enabling these things to happen, all it's going to take is once for it to happen. You know, with other pieces of legislation that I've spoken to and given examples of where things have gone where they shouldn't have: I provide the example, and that's all it takes, the once. I'd hate to see a potentially promising housing facility that could get our most vulnerable people, you know, off the streets and under a roof, in a warm bed, having dinner at the table rather than on a park bench or something like that – we don't want to see those types of projects put at risk simply because developers didn't get the answer that they were, unfortunately, trying to get from municipal leaders.

It will also, of course, then give us the ability to be able to look at Bill 48 and the changes that we just heard being proposed and talked about in full by the Minister of Children's Services. You know, it doesn't put the Assembly in a situation now where we're having to pick one potential thing over the other, because they're both very important on their own.

Again, I can't help but wonder why these pieces were added within this given size, the scope of them, the implications of each of them, and sort of handed off to the ministry of red tape reduction when, even if we did pass it all – and I certainly would never ever presuppose the decision of the Assembly – we find ourselves just in a place I don't think we want to go. By accepting amendment A3 here – and maybe there are other ways we can look at those kinds of things. I don't think they should have belonged within the ministry of red tape, because any calls that are going to come into that are immediately going to get bounced back to the respective ministry, so those two big pieces should have been kept within their respective ministries.

Again, you know, when we're looking at the different changes encompassed within Bill 48 – I hate to say it – it just seems like there were a bunch of odds and ends that were put together to try to maybe shroud some of the changes, I think more specifically around the MGA, because I think what's happening within child, youth, and family is a good thing. I should probably mention that I guess I am a little disappointed that some of the recommendations that we saw from the child intervention panel were not included within that. I think the work that was done there was meaningful and provided us with avenues that could have made the lives of Albertans a lot better. You know, it's unfortunate that we haven't seen any changes within that, which, of course, then speaks even further to why this was put under the ministry of red tape and not kept within social services.

I do look forward to further debate here on amendment A3, and I may have more to say after that. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to comment on amendment A3? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure if I've had the pleasure of seeing you in the chair, so thank you.

I'm proud to speak to the amendment from my colleague from Edmonton-Decore on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. When I saw what he was proposing, I most certainly wanted to stand up and speak to it, because it's something that's really important to me. I won't, for the sake of time, speak too, too long, but I did want to get this on the record.

I've not had a chance to dig deep in debate here in the House on Bill 48, which I might note to those watching eagerly at home is a large, large, omnibus bill, all sort of summarized under red tape reduction. You know, as my colleagues have aptly stated, including our critic for red tape from Edmonton-Decore, we have a lot of concerns with pieces of this bill. Again, there's a lot to unpack here.

Now, specific to this amendment A3 on municipal reserves, you know, for those who don't know, what the bill does is that it does take away a municipality's right to an additional 5 per cent of municipal reserve land. As my colleague talked about, this is really important land. I think about schools, fire halls, playgrounds. The other side is claiming that this land is hardly used, and I think that right now more than ever – I've stood in this House many times and talked about how, since the outset of the pandemic we need to be really thinking deeply on the decisions that we're making. I think this pandemic has highlighted just how critical spaces are, how critical land is to our cities at a time when so many folks are feeling isolated and feeling like they need to maintain that connection to the outdoors and whatnot. It's about spaces and places and just how critical they are.

5:30

The member as well talked about – he stole a lot of my points that I wanted to make, but that's good because I know we don't have a lot of time. I've stood in this House many times and talked about the importance of supporting folks who are experiencing homelessness and pointed out that I see that every day in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, where we do have the bulk of the social service agencies that are supporting the homeless. You know, whether it's Bissell Centre, Hope Mission, Mustard Seed – the list goes on – we see how critical those organizations are, but we also see and the pandemic has highlighted just how critical it is to house folks.

We are very much worried on our side of the House. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, our critic for housing, my colleague from St. Albert, our critic for the area around homelessness, have both been very vocal about how essential it is that we offer safe and healthy spaces for folks. We worry on our side of the House that Bill 48 as it stands could hamper those efforts from our municipalities and from, of course, our provincial partners as well although we need them to be stepping up a whole lot more, especially when it comes to affordable housing. This bill will in fact hamper those efforts.

You know, we just accepted an amendment from the government. I'm hoping that they will do the same and truly consider the impacts of their bill as written and instead accept our suggested amendment because, truly, I think it will help a lot of people. It will help folks who are experiencing homelessness, and it could also help a lot of community organizations and whatnot moving forward as we look at inventive ways to use space and placemake, as they call it, and really create vibrant communities for all of us.

With that, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak on amendment A3?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are now back on Bill 48. Any members wishing to – I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to add my voice to the debate on Bill 48, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). As you can see if you're following at home, it's a giant bill, 143 pages covering – what does it say here? – 12 pieces of legislation across eight government ministries. It's a gigantic piece of legislation. I must say that, you know, I wonder if this isn't creating more red tape. It seems like the whole second half of it is a brand new piece of legislation, so it wasn't even existing before. That's questionable right there, just in terms of the paper it's covered.

I guess I wanted to talk about, first of all, just sort of some general comments. It really covers from birth to death and everything in between, it seems. It talks about birth. You think about, perhaps, adoption, you know, babies being adopted. That's birth, and then death: it talks about cadavers; no need for that legislation because people donate those bodies to the university already. Before, there was a provision where people needed to have some kind of regulation or legislation to donate cadavers. So there: very much birth to death.

Just keeping with this theme, there's a whole piece about – they're calling it golden girls legislation. It's about seniors being able to live together. Well, gosh, no need to create that legislation. That already exists. We don't need any. Seniors live together all the time, groups of people, even if they're related or not related. We don't have to legislate that. It doesn't make any sense at all. Why bother writing that down? That's red tape that's creating red tape, as far as I can see.

Certainly, our critics on this bill have spoken about it. There are some concerns specifically regarding what this government is doing sort of, you know, mucking around a lot with municipalities and sort of dictating what they're supposed to do, making it tougher for municipalities. Certainly, the Member for Calgary-Buffer, who's our critic in that area, says that it's really hamstringing local councils' ability to make agreements with local developers and do better urban planning. I mean, I think we all know this. I think all the MLAs would agree with me on this, that they want to make local decisions, like, local decisions. People grow up in those communities. If they ran for political office, say, at the town level or the city level, they know that place very well, hopefully have the best interests of that community in mind.

For government to come over and say, "Hey, you've got to do it this way, or we're going to take away this, or we're going to do this, or we're going to give you this much time" – I don't know – it seems to be having a bit of a God complex or something, like, imposing a lot on municipal leaders. I think the municipal leaders are very concerned about this. We've heard from them that this is really almost undoable, to expect them to be able to pass things through their process at the speed with which this bill is suggesting they must.

Certainly, there are also concerns about removing the requirements to preserve reserve land, you know, taking away that 5 per cent. These are often spaces for parks and playgrounds and fire halls, EMS stations, schools. Our critic for Service Alberta had spoken publicly about some of the concerns regarding that. Again, it's concerning that the provincial government is sort of mucking around in areas that really should be more under local, I think, authority and causing some hardship for councils in towns and cities across our province.

I guess I do have some questions for the minister of red tape. Some concerns have to do with the Historical Resources Act. Bill 48 removes the registered historical resources from the provincial system. I don't know. I mean, I care very much about the history of

Alberta, and I think that having historical resources designations are very important. There may be sacred land. It could be, you know, a burial ground for the indigenous people. It could be a building that's historic, that needs to be preserved and protected so developers can't just come in and level it, and then our heritage is lost.

I'm not exactly sure why this would be just sort of completely abolished from legislation provincially. I mean, there's talk that that could be taken over by the municipalities, again sort of mucking around, controlling what's happening in other levels of government, which I have a concern the government is doing, actually putting a burden on these towns and cities because the resources, then, of the provincial government are there. You know, if all the municipalities have to be the record keepers for these sites now, isn't that sort of maybe even a less efficient way to do those things, when you have many people doing similar things across the whole province? Sometimes that can be streamlined. I'm not really clear on why this would be abolished, this whole piece, this heritage resource designation.

I also wonder – I think that we have a rich history of indigenous peoples, the Métis people, First Nations people. You know, all three treaties across our province: were they consulted about this? Will their sacred land, sacred burial grounds be respected? What's happening with that? Will that be onerous for them, to have to deal with many different towns or cities to have a joint agreement? Anyway, I feel like – certainly, I would welcome any comments from the minister regarding what his thoughts are about this.

5:40

I'll just turn to another page. Certainly, I mean, I did talk briefly about the Municipal Government Act. Municipalities lose power to determine their own development timelines. Specifically, municipalities now have 20 days to determine whether a development permit application is complete, 40 days to approve or deny it, and 60 days in total to approve or deny an application from the time it was received. You know, my understanding from just some personal acquaintances I have in the development world is that this is pretty ridiculous. This is kind of not fair and totally undoable, to expect municipal councils to be able to do this. It is, again, this provincial government dictating what municipal government does even to the minutia of when they decide on development timelines. I mean, I feel that it's an overreach. The government is going too far in this.

As I said in my opening remarks, municipalities also lose the right to an additional 5 per cent of reserve land. It's the choice of the municipality to use it or not. But it still is something that was there, and now that provision is not there.

Then it says that municipalities cannot restrict seniors from living together. Well, I mean, they never could. People can live with other adults. It's up to them, so it seems a bit odd. I think they're following some of their Conservative friends in Ontario. I don't know. It looked good in their platform. But that's not even needed to be done.

Then moving on just to the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, this is, like – oh, gosh, how many is it? Twenty-three self-governing professional regulatory associations are registered under the act. These are different professions that self-govern, right? They have membership of people who qualify into that particular profession. For example – I'm not in this act; I'm in the Health Professions Act – I'm a registered social worker in this province, so the Alberta College of Social Workers represents me and the 8,000 or so registered social workers across the province.

Self-regulating: that really means that you do have some autonomy as a profession, that you want to make sure that the codes of ethics of your profession are followed, the standards of practice. There's disciplinary action against a social worker who breaches

the code or the standards. Then, of course, there could be a hearing, and, you know, people can ultimately have their licences taken away if there's some unethical practice. This is the same kind of thing with this.

But it's also part of associations, so collective voices about concerns can be shared. Certainly, you know, one of the values of social work is social justice, advocacy, speaking up collectively about that. But this seems to suggest that the minister of red tape can sort of – I don't know – close down an association if they deem that important, if they decide that that should be done. It just seems more stuff, which also is happening in Bill 46, to silence anybody who is an advocate, who speaks up for things that perhaps this government doesn't agree with. That's disturbing because that, of course, squashes democracy.

I feel like I've just touched the surface of a few of the elements of this omnibus bill, but I know we have other legislation to look at this afternoon, so I will take my seat.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members looking to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you recognizing me. I appreciate the robust debate that we've had this evening, but at this time I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

Bill Pr. 1 The Sisters of the Precious Blood of Edmonton Repeal Act

The Acting Chair: Any hon. members looking to speak to the bill? I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to briefly touch on Pr. 1. You know, here's another situation of an organization that got caught up in legislation of the day, way in the past, where it was decided that some organizations had to come before the Assembly, present a bill just to change the name over the door, which I don't think is a good use of those organizations' time.

Of course, the Sisters of the Precious Blood of Edmonton is one of those ones that have now fallen in that because they want to wrap up their operations for all the good work that they've done over the years supporting their community. There's no reason why we need to hold this up any longer. They've done their homework. They've gotten their paperwork in order. All I can say is: thank you for everything that they've done unto the community, and I suggest everybody support the passing of Bill Pr. 1.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other hon. members looking to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Anyone opposed? Also carried.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I move that the committee rise and report Bill Pr. 1 and report progress on bills 43 and 48.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill Pr. 1. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 43, Bill 48. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone opposed? So ordered.

Private Bills Third Reading

Bill Pr. 1 The Sisters of the Precious Blood of Edmonton Repeal Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and to move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, The Sisters of the Precious Blood of Edmonton Repeal Act.

As the members for Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-Decore graciously made speeches about the effect and the contribution of the community of sisters to their communities and to Edmonton and the province as a whole, I will leave my speech short in thanking them.

Again, as the members opposite implored, I too implore all members to speedily vote for this so that the sisters can finish winding up their business in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Just very quick concluding comments from the opposition. We stand in support of this bill. I want to thank all who came to present to the private members' bill committee: Sister Anne Rajotte, Father Adam Lech, and their counsel, Jeffrey Arsenault and Lorimer Dawson.

The one other thing I will just mention is that at that private members' bill committee Sister Rajotte spoke to the committee to simply put on the record that all of the sisters are now well looked after. I just wanted to add that for anyone watching at home.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Looking for anyone else wishing to speak to the bill, I recognize the hon. deputy House leader.

Mr. Nally: I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Acting Speaker: All right. Anyone now wishing to speak to Bill Pr. 1?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. deputy House leader.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I just say that that chair looks good on you. I might also point out that I think I have the

dubious honour of being one of the few members that lost a vote in this House on the government side, so thank you for that dubious honour.

Nonetheless, it's getting close to the dinner hour, and I know that some members on this side are getting a little hangry. I suggest that we make a motion that the Assembly adjourns until 7:30 on Wednesday, December 2, 2020.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m.]

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