



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 8, 2020

Day 78

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Hon. Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UCP)
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UCP)
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UCP),
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Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 8, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing as we pay tribute to a former member of this Assembly who passed away recently.

Mrs. Judith D. Gordon

February 19, 1948, to December 1, 2020

The Speaker: Mrs. Judy Gordon was elected as a Progressive Conservative member for Lacombe-Stettler on June 15, 1993, and was re-elected in the 1997 and 2001 general elections. She served three terms for that constituency until 2004. In addition to serving on numerous committees and task forces, Mrs. Gordon was the Deputy Chair of Committees from 1997 to 2001. On April 23, 1997, she and two other women, including our current Clerk, made Alberta Legislative history, when for the first time the presiding officer and table officers were all women.

Mrs. Gordon's career began in 1977 as an accountant, then moved into politics in 1986, when she served as an elected councillor for the city of Lacombe. In 1989 Mrs. Gordon was elected mayor of Lacombe, a position she held until 1993 and again from 2004 to 2010. After her tenure in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Mrs. Gordon was dedicated to her community, serving tirelessly as a strong voice for her constituents.

Judy Gordon passed away last week at the age of 72. In a moment of silent prayer I ask that each of you remember Mrs. Gordon as you may have known her. Rest eternal grant unto her, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon her.

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

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

Premier's Communications on COVID-19

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier has failed Albertans at every step of this pandemic. He blamed my constituents and the entirety of northeast Calgary for spreading the COVID-19 virus. He defended his antisocialism, antimask MLAs who spread dangerous misinformation, claiming that wearing masks spread COVID, that children washing their hands was unacceptable, and that the worst of COVID was behind us. He also refused the chief medical officer's advice on a number of important matters related to this pandemic.

When the Minister of Transportation's friend organized the first antimask rally, the Premier refused to condemn it. It's the same organizer who accused members of the Calgary police of being Nazis and claimed that the Premier had given him permission to violate public health orders. The Premier didn't feel the need to refute this.

Throughout this pandemic while our public health officials have been working day and night to save lives, this Premier and this Health minister actively undermine them. By doing this, they encourage their far-right friends to take actions against our public health officials and measures. Now we see that John Carpay, who this Premier once shockingly compared to Rosa Parks, is suing our chief medical officer of health for trying to protect lives, Mr. Speaker. The Premier hasn't denounced this lawsuit. He hasn't condemned those filing it. He hasn't even defended our chief medical officer from the hateful actions of his friends. The Premier is not a leader; he is a failure, and Albertans deserve so much better.

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

Hanukkah

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Thursday, December 10, or the 25th of Kislev, marks the beginning of Hanukkah, the festival of lights. In the Hebrew language the meaning of Hanukkah is "to dedicate." Hanukkah is an eight-day Jewish celebration that serves to commemorate the rededication of the second temple in Jerusalem during the period around 160 BCE.

There is, in fact, much history to reflect on when considering the historical origins of Hanukkah as a series of turbulent historical events inspired this most important Jewish celebration. After banning Judaism and its practices, then King Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his armies defiled the second temple, erected an altar to Zeus, and decreed an end to many Jewish faith practices. The Jewish community revolted, culminating in the reclamation of the temple and the rebuilding of the altar. The altar was rebuilt by Maccabee, and the sacred lamp had to be relit, but there was only enough sanctified oil remaining in the temple to keep the lamp burning for one day. It would take eight days to produce more sanctified oil. And then the miracle occurred. The lamp stayed lit for the whole eight days: the miracle of light.

As Hanukkah is celebrated this year, we are inspired by that miracle. This has been a difficult year, and we've been inspired by the Jewish community's capacity to worship and celebrate safely. I was reminded of this as I spoke to Mrs. S. a few days ago, who pointed out how so many families celebrated the High Holidays in September in a safe way. I want to wish everybody in the Jewish community a safe and happy Hanukkah. It will be different this year, but I know that we will all find a way to celebrate safely. To all a very happy Hanukkah.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Mr. Loewen:

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the land
COVID was stirring; it was getting out of hand.
The children were in school with hand sanitizer,
With teachers so diligent they made them the wiser.

The doctors were wrestling with pandemic effects,
Working into the nights so their plans had no wrecks.
Nurses also had their essential work to do.
They masked; they shielded and sanitized, too.

The truckers who delivered the product we need
Delivered on time, with deadlines to heed.
They drove day and night, crossing borders with ease,
Only to be stopped if they happened to sneeze.

I have to admit, the ones I most think of
Are the grocery store clerks as precious as doves.

When over toilet paper people did battle,
The clerks sorted them out just like cattle.

Now, some of the most hardest hit souls
Were the people employed in tourism roles.
Whether store clerks or guides or hotel staff,
They had no clients, not even the riff-raff.

Now Windwick, now Shandro, now Hinshaw and
Kenney,
On cabinet, on Legislature, on AHS and Health ministry.
They had so many tough decisions to make
Regarding a virus no one knew how to take.

In the beginning it was all about flattening the curve,
Not to overburden the health system it was to serve.
No decisions were made without great angst.
It was easy to see there weren't many thanks.

There is no doubt there were mistakes made.
That became apparent as time was to fade.
As spring turned into summer, the numbers did drop,
Leaving people to believe the plan was a flop.

But summer turned to fall, and to winter we went.
Then numbers rose, and Dr. Hinshaw did present
Other options for bringing the numbers down low
In hopes that rising hospitalizations would slow.

The decisions made were easy to criticize.
Even this author took time to surmise.
Decisions are made with the best intent,
So Albertans not to hospitals be sent.

The most vulnerable to COVID, we found in the end,
Were seniors and health compromised with nothing to fend.
Our sorrow goes out to those that were lost.
Their families and friends sure felt a great cost.

Now on the horizon we have a vaccine
Our Alberta group will be delivering routine.
So now as we look forward to 2021,
The economy will return and, along with it, fun.

We know Albertans in the end will persevere
And will look forward to the future with plenty of cheer.
So as we go into this Christmas season,
Never forget the celebration's reason:
To remember a child born in a stable at night.
So Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

The Speaker: I reminded the member last week that perhaps the use of a prop, no matter how noble it is, was still unacceptable. The same would go today with the use of names in a member's statement. I know that the hon. member can do better, and I'm sure that he will.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

1:40

Farmer Protests in India

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers are protesting the Indian government's agriculture bill, calling out the bill's attack on the agricultural produce market and the minimum support price and viewing these bills as a death warrant for them. After months-long demonstrations and no government intention to help, the massive protest broke with the farmers' call: let's move to Delhi, the capital of India. The union government of BJP and the Haryana government led by BJP failed in their attempts to suppress the protesters by barricading them and using water cannons. The protesters' peaceful agitation continues, and hundreds of thousands are staging a dharna at Delhi borders as we speak. Three general

strikes, a complete shutdown of India were called, and hundreds of millions of Indians have participated in these strikes and protested in solidarity with the farmers.

The farmers' support has grown world-wide. People have been protesting, and politicians are speaking in support of the farmers. Protests are also being organized in Calgary and Edmonton. Many events supporting the farmers were organized over the past week in my riding, Edmonton-Meadows. But India's BJP government is still committed to implementing its plan to increase big corporate profits over agriculture. Mr. Speaker, we know that prioritizing corporations over people does not work. Here in Alberta the UCP government has handed out \$4.7 billion to big profitable corporations and hasn't created a single job or yielded any benefits to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, along with my NDP caucus colleagues I support the farmers' rights to peaceful protests, and I ask the BJP government of India to stop using the system to barricade the protests and come to a meaningful resolution to the farmers' concerns.

Thank you.

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

30th Legislature, Second Session, Reflections

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was the session before Christmas, and all through the
Leg
All the MLAs were shouting and clearly on edge
For the NDP were fighting for red tape far and near
And have been using their tools of fear and smear.

They were getting mad at the sewer rats around
For exiling the opposition in the last electoral round.
But with anger and Twitter and a whole lot of growlin',
They still used their affiliate and friend Gil McGowan.

But Albertans need not be worried and feel quite at ease
For they know that Team Orange is always displeased.
In 2020 came an unexpected guest named COVID-19,
And due to him, we've had no rest.

But with the calm guidance of Dr. Hinshaw and her
wonderful chemistry coat,
We will all get through this, but it's too soon to gloat.
Albertans are looking to our government with hope
That we can build our society that is resilient in scope,

To create jobs in our province with a pipeline or three,
And look for value-add industries in high tech and trees.
To help lead the charge, without calling them out,
For the Speaker will call it unparliamentary and shout,

But from Acadia and Grande Prairie, to simply name a
few,
Albertans can rest assured that the people in charge
know what to do.

And at the helm of the government, Lougheed is his
riding,

Is a leader that Albertans can trust, with no semblance of
backsliding.

So with plans for hydrogen and trying to help businesses
out,

We will not care how much the NDP shout
Because they had four years to show us, with policies
that were tired,

And when Albertans had their chance, to the NDP they
said: you're fired.

So to finish my poem, to Albertans far and near,
From La Crête to Fort Mac and even Red Deer,

We're working as hard as we can, beyond doubt there cannot be,
To ensure that our children's future is strong and Alberta remains free.

Bill 47

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, many times I've heard this Premier speak about not wanting to infringe on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Bill 47, however, removes many rights from Alberta workers, and when it comes to those rights, we haven't heard a peep. Bill 47 will remove rights from the working Albertans that keep our provincial economy going, and this government is now rushing to do so during the biggest health crisis our province has ever faced. This bill attacks workers' rights to know about hazards in their workplace. This bill attacks workers' rights to participate in the decision-making for their own safe work environment. This bill attacks workers' rights to refuse unsafe work. This bill attacks workers, full stop.

Albertans have the right to know when their government is debating these sorts of important changes, but this government brought forward Bill 47 during a pandemic with minimal consultation while Alberta families are naturally focused on their own lives and livelihoods. Rushing through these massive labour reforms with minimal debate is morally wrong and an affront to our province's democratic traditions.

Bill 47 is stripping away presumptive coverage for PTSD trauma while our doctors, nurses, and medical staff are dealing with daily COVID-19 horrors in their workplace. Think about that. As we speak, some of Alberta's health care heroes are currently suffering mental health injuries on the job. We are in here with this UCP government rushing to take away PTSD coverage for the brave Albertans who may need it very soon. It's beyond shameful, and this government and this Premier have lost their moral compass. The actions of this government are repugnant, and Albertans know it.

This bill attacks the rights and the safety of every single person that has kept us healthy and safe during the pandemic, and it attacks the rights and safety of every single person who will help us build our province back up, the very people this government swore they're looking after.

This is not leadership. The UCP does not have the best interest of Albertans in mind.

COVID-19 and Seniors' Mental Health

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, as we approach holiday season, it's important for Albertans of all faiths to prepare for unusual, COVID-driven celebratory observance. At this time of year families and friends are typically planning gatherings and celebrations; however, this year we're in a heated battle with a global pandemic. Current restrictions limit gatherings and visits, but let's be grateful that Albertans are still busy planning a distanced festive season, connecting in unique and creative ways with plans for virtual gatherings, and never again taking hugs, embraces, and shared cheer for granted.

Sadly, it's our province's most respected and valued citizens that will undoubtedly feel most isolated during these increasingly challenging times. It has become painfully clear that seniors are most vulnerable when it comes to isolation, enduring health and mental health risks of COVID-19. Therefore, the priority for Albertans must be on protecting themselves, being responsible to others with particular diligence if your life includes interaction with vulnerable family, friends, or others in the community. I urge all Albertans to consider not only our treasured seniors but those that

care each and every day for those concerned. A family member living with you, an isolated senior living on their own, or to those caring for residents in various public, private, and nonprofit residential settings: you all deserve our heartfelt thanks.

Luckily for us we live in an age where we can reach out to loved ones and colleagues with a few simple clicks, something all Albertans, even the technologically challenged, should take advantage of over the coming weeks. Whether its a phone call, video call, or even a video message, 10 minutes or an hour, any time you reach out will change someone's day for the better, letting them know that you care and that they are not alone.

To all members of this Assembly, our incredible, dedicated staff, and to all Albertans across this province: stay healthy, be responsible, and take care of yourself and others as we face this challenge together as proud, strong, free, responsible, and compassionate Albertans. Happy holidays to all. Thoughts and prayers to all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has a statement to make.

Agriculture

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to hear the news that Alberta's agriculture is leading Alberta's economic recovery. Strong numbers throughout the year show that the hard work of farmers and ranchers is paying off. After a record year agriculture exports have surged by 30 per cent, resulting in nearly \$190 million in new exports. Farmers and ranchers work tirelessly every day to provide us with the food that we need and have proven very successful this year. Agriculture is very important to my constituency, and I'm happy to say that they are a part of this economic recovery.

Agriculture is the foundation of our province and was a major contributor to how this province was founded. During the late 1800s settlers found abundant grasses and a climate moderated by chinook winds in the winter, which was assumed would make year-round grazing possible. When the government of Canada developed the Canadian Pacific Railway in southern Alberta in 1883, it brought a wave of immigration that would peak just before the First World War. Many of these immigrants to Alberta were settlers from Europe but also others from eastern provinces and the United States. Many of them were granted homesteads. Homesteads are granted land in which they primarily relied on wheat as their main crop.

As the province grew and developed over the years, so did our agriculture industry. Today we can see our agriculture industry spread throughout the province either by producers of crops or livestock. I'm proud that my constituency of Cardston-Siksika is involved in such a great and historic part of this province. Alberta's agriculture is stronger now more than ever and has been a leader in our economic recovery. I would like to thank all the farmers who worked tirelessly throughout the year, even in the pandemic, to drive economic innovation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Case Increase and Response

Ms Notley: Twenty thousand active cases. Mr. Speaker, that is a line no one thought we would cross last month, but here we are. The

Premier's half measures are not working. Yesterday Dr. Hinshaw was asked directly what needed to happen, and she said, quote, the current measures we have in place are not likely to be sufficient to bring down our numbers. If the goal is to bring down our numbers, we will need additional measures to do that. To the Premier: is his goal to bring the numbers down? If so, why hasn't he taken action yet to do that?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has taken action all along the way, doing our best as a government to be able to balance lives and livelihoods. There have been restrictions that have been made at different intervals over the last several weeks. The Premier and the Health minister will have a press conference later this afternoon to talk about the next steps for our province. Again, we're going to continue to not let the NDP continue to play politics with people's lives. Instead, we're going to focus as a government on getting Alberta through this, focusing on protecting lives and livelihoods.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, instead of decisive action Albertans watched their Premier spend all of November rejecting public health advice, delivering lectures about comorbidities, blaming ethnic communities, failing to support small and medium-sized businesses, catering to antimaskers, jeopardizing health care resources, hiding information, and then hiding himself from the public. As of today we've lost more than 600 Albertans, and there are 600 more in hospital. Premier: why did you waste all of November, and why are you still wasting time now?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would think that the unprecedented steps that this government had to take in November are nothing. They had significant impacts on the people of Alberta, but they are actions that had to be taken to stop COVID-19 from proceeding at the rapid rate that it is through our population. Again, the Premier and the Health minister will have more steps that they will announce later this afternoon. Unlike the NDP we're not going to play politics with people that are dying. Shame on them. Instead, we're going to focus on lives and livelihoods, standing with Albertans and getting them through it, and the NDP should stop their fearmongering.

Ms Notley: Well, your focus on livelihood has lost lives.

The Premier claimed that his failure to protect public health was about saving the economy, but it was really just about giving himself an excuse to ignore businesses in need. Listen, we know some form of lockdown is inevitable, and businesses will suffer even more. We've heard from businesses that your programs have not been enough to keep them afloat. In advance of further restrictions will you commit today to at least provide \$25,000 to support each business that is struggling through this pandemic?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's the truth. This government rose very quickly after we faced the pandemic and announced a series of initiatives that provided relief to small businesses, and small businesses have been challenged. We announced and rolled out the Workers' Compensation Board premium abatement, which provides a premium coverage for half of the year for small and medium-sized businesses. We deferred corporate income taxes. We've rolled out the business relaunch

grant. We've added to it, and the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation will be making more announcements this afternoon.

Ms Notley: Well, I certainly hope he takes our advice.

Now, today we learned that the Canadian Forces are prepared to deploy troops in Alberta to deal with the crisis created by COVID-19 and this government's failure to act. According to CBC they are anticipating demand by calling in hundreds of reservists. They're being trained now on how to wear PPE, how to look after seniors in long-term care, and they're being trained on how to comfort Albertans who are dying from COVID-19. Premier, our health care system is overwhelmed because of your bad decisions. Now we're asking for field hospitals and calling in the military. How could you possibly let it come to this?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the answer is: that is not true. The Alberta government has not called for the military to be in Alberta. We are continuing to move forward as a province to, again, help protect Albertans as well as protect their livelihoods. The Premier and the Health minister will have more announcements tomorrow. But the NDP continuing to make things up inside the House is not helpful. That's just fearmongering, and it's very, very disappointing behaviour from the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: He's right. I misspoke. They didn't call in the military. What actually happens is that they are entirely out of the loop. The Health minister's office told CBC that they didn't even know the forces were planning a deployment. Mr. Speaker, based on that statement, it appears the Canadian military is actually planning around this government's incompetence. That is next-level incompetence. Can the Premier explain how in heaven's name he doesn't know the military is planning to deploy hundreds of soldiers into Alberta's long-term care as early as this weekend? What is going on over there?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that is not true. It's disappointing to see the Leader of the Official Opposition stating things that are very clearly not factual inside this Chamber, completely and utterly inappropriate. She should stop with the fearmongering. I want to be very, very clear. The military is not being deployed into long-term care inside our province.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the presentation used to train the incoming military personnel warns that the nature and amount of death they may observe means they could experience what is called "moral injury." This is defined as, quote, perpetrating, failing to prevent, or witnessing actions that violate deeply held moral beliefs. Then they identified PTSD as one condition that may arise. Why, on the very day we learn that the military thinks PTSD is a likely outcome for all health care providers, are you jamming through legislation that would steal PTSD coverage from all Alberta health care workers?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again the NDP is just making things up. Albertans deserve a heck of a lot better from the Official Opposition, and they're going to get it from their government. We're focused on lives and livelihoods, not playing politics like that hon. member, not fearmongering like the NDP continue to do inside this Chamber. The Health minister and the Premier are going to have more to say about this this afternoon, but Alberta's government is going to take a reasonable approach, work with Albertans, focus on lives and livelihoods. Again to the NDP: just stop fearmongering.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Premier's Remarks on COVID-19

Ms Notley: Thankfully, there is a public record outside of this building that records the facts. Yesterday the Premier said that a significant majority of people with COVID-19 are not sick. This statement is not only insensitive; it's not true and ignores that medical science is still determining the long-term impacts of this condition. The CDC, the WHO, the Mayo Clinic, Harvard Medicine, and more have all found evidence of recurring or late symptoms as COVID impacts more than the lungs but also the heart and the brain. Premier, you say that these Albertans aren't sick, but you're not a doctor, so clear this up: who's right, the combined medical expertise of the world's leading health researchers or you?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is a very serious situation. The province of Alberta is in a state of emergency. The Premier has in no way said that it is not serious. In fact, he's taken unprecedented steps to be able to help Albertans bend the curve. We're going to continue to do that. The NDP, unfortunately, though, just want to shut everything down and be damned with the consequences. That is extraordinarily unfortunate. We're going to work, again, to protect lives and livelihoods. We're not going to join the NDP in playing politics on this. Again to the Leader of the Official Opposition: shame on you.

Ms Notley: Shame on the Government House Leader. In *Hansard* it says very clearly that the majority of Albertans who are infected will not get sick from COVID-19. That's what the Premier said. Read the record.

Quote: from January through March it just felt like recurring exhaustion; they don't know how to get my breath back. That's Calgarian Cody Morash, who has had symptoms for nearly 11 months. Premier, are you telling these Albertans that they're just not sick, that you're the doctor, you know the medical evidence, you're right, and their symptoms are just pretend?

The Speaker: I might remind the Leader of the Official Opposition that no matter how passionate the question is, it should go through the Speaker.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what is a fact is that the majority of people – many of the people, I should say – who get COVID-19 do not have symptoms, which is what the Premier was referring to. That does not mean that it is not a serious disease or may not have impact on those individuals. Alberta's government is taking this very, very seriously, putting in strong actions to be able to protect the citizens of this province, and we're going to continue to focus on getting our province through this, protecting lives and livelihoods. The NDP playing politics over and over and over in this Chamber does not save one life. Again to the Leader of the Official Opposition: shame on you.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, being Premier does not give one a medical licence to play doctor. By saying that the majority of Albertans get "cold-like symptoms, and they are not sick," the Premier is once again comparing COVID to the flu. It not only reveals his own personal prejudice against taking action; it's against everything Dr. Hinshaw is pleading with Albertans to understand. It encourages people to ignore the rules, furthering the spread, putting more lives at risk. Will the Premier stand up, withdraw those comments, and apologize to Albertans for not taking this pandemic seriously as evidenced by his comments on the record in this House yesterday?

2:00

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the opposition just proves the point over and over. All they can do is fearmonger. The Premier saying that many people do not have symptoms when they have COVID-19 or have cold-like symptoms does not mean that he's downplaying COVID-19. That is completely and utterly ridiculous. What needs to happen is that the Leader of the Official Opposition and her caucus should apologize to this Chamber and should apologize to Albertans for continuing to play politics with people's lives, for continuing to fearmonger. Albertans are being done a disservice from this Official Opposition. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would like to ask a question, I'm sure she can have an opportunity later because the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the call.

COVID-19 Case Increase and Response (continued)

Member Ceci: I won't hesitate to take further action to protect the citizens of Calgary: that was Mayor Nenshi's declaration yesterday as this Premier demonstrates a stunning lack of leadership to get control of this pandemic. We have a Premier who refuses to bring in a mask mandate as he cowers from his responsibilities, a Premier who refuses to discuss the R-value because he won't ever admit he is wrong. We need a leader. To the Premier: when will you grow a backbone and get control of this pandemic?

Mr. Jason Nixon: There goes the NDP again. All they can do, Mr. Speaker, is call names and fearmonger inside this place. The Premier and Health minister have made significant steps along the way in trying to be able to help our province get through this and to find balance while protecting lives and livelihoods, and more of those steps will take place this afternoon. If the hon. members would like to know more about that, I encourage them to tune in to the Premier's press conference and in the meantime stop fearmongering and stop playing politics inside the Chamber.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you. It's not just Calgary who sees a Premier plagued by indecision and half measures. Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson says that his city is, quote, on a collision course with calamity. End quote. The data has been clear for months: exponential growth in cases, hospitals overwhelmed, and people dying. And what do we see from the Premier? A total abdication of leadership and a complete failure to plan for the second wave of this pandemic. To the Premier. Explain to Albertans why your COVID-19 containment strategy has been such a failure. How did you get it so wrong?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 numbers across the world are going up right now. This is an unprecedented problem that we are facing as a province. It should not be about politics. Unfortunately, we know that with the NDP that's all they can do, play the politics of fear and smear. The Premier and this government have been making decisions along the way, Mr. Speaker, and they're going to make more decisions today. I encourage the Official Opposition and all Albertans to tune in to the Minister of Health and the Premier's press conference today to learn more.

Member Ceci: Leading in the country in pandemic infections, one-third of the population of Ontario. On November 23 the Premier got

a letter from 341 doctors begging him to get control of this pandemic. It was the third urgent call for action, but the Premier couldn't summon the courage to lead. The doctors are leading, the mayors are leading, the military is leading, and they're doing it around this government. It's a far cry from the spring, when this Premier pretended he was the next incarnation of Winston Churchill. Well, the results are in, Mr. Speaker: no Winston Churchill on that side. You've failed Alberta workers, small businesses, seniors, schoolchildren.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, you want to know who has failed Albertans?

Ms Pancholi: You're the government. Start acting like it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: The Official Opposition, who at this point may be the worst Official Opposition in the history of this province. That hon. member in particular, who we know already was the worst Finance minister in the history of this province . . .

Member Ceci: You got him right beside you.

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . has now moved to the opposition benches to continue the behaviour that he had in government, which is to fearmonger and do nothing on behalf of the people of Alberta and instead to play politics and practise the politics of fear and smear.

Member Ceci: Deficit leader.

Ms Pancholi: You're an embarrassment.

Mr. Jason Nixon: This side of the House is not going to do that. Shame on the NDP, Mr. Speaker. We're going to move forward for Albertans.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted at 2:04.

I'm not sure why you remain standing. [interjections] Order.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small and medium-sized businesses have experienced an unprecedented loss in revenue due to COVID-19. That's why I was thankful that the Alberta government initiated the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant, which promised much-needed financial assistance to Alberta businesses and not-for-profits who were ordered to close or partially close, resulting in revenue reductions by at least 40 per cent. My question is to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. How much has Alberta's government allocated to this grant, and how much will each applicant receive?

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government has allocated \$200 million to the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant program, and as of yesterday we've spent over \$65 million of that budget. Each applicant is able to apply for up to \$5,000. Understanding that the public health restrictions have been difficult for many small businesses, we recently expanded the program, so those that have already received the grant are going to be able to apply for a second grant of up to \$5,000.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that Alberta's government has committed \$200 million in funding for this program and given that Alberta's government recognizes the negative impacts of health restrictions on business and given that the province has recovered more than 247,000 of the 360,900 jobs lost between February and April of this year, to the same minister: how many businesses have applied for this grant in the first round of applications, and when will the second round open?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've see more than 20,000 businesses apply for the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant in the first round of applications, and more than half of them received the full amount of \$5,000. The second round of applications opens on Monday, and we're expecting that up to an additional 6,000 businesses will be eligible for the program due to the reduced revenue loss threshold of 40 per cent. Small businesses have been greatly challenged in this province, but I've been amazed at their innovative resilience and the way that they have adjusted their operations to continue to serve Albertans.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, thank you to the minister. Given Alberta's real GDP is expected to contract by 8.1 per cent and given our government does not project a full recovery to 2019 levels of our real gross domestic product until 2023 and given that small and medium-sized businesses are essential to the economic growth and success of our province's COVID-19 recovery plan, can the minister please provide the projected benefits that programs such as the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant have on Alberta's economy?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The small and medium enterprise relaunch grant has been awarded to over 17,000 of our small businesses, giving them more than \$65 million in support. Those businesses employ over 170,000 Albertans, and they're using the grant to keep their doors open. Again, I'm incredibly proud and amazed at the innovative resilience of Alberta's small businesses as they adjust their operations and continue to provide employment for tens of thousands of Albertans.

Bill 47

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the government has introduced time allocation motions on four pieces of legislation, including a bill that attacks workers' safety, during a pandemic. Given that we've only had one hour of debate on Bill 47 in committee and given that if this government provides us with the opportunity, we will have more than 25 amendments to improve this awful legislation, to the Minister of Labour and Immigration: if you are so proud of Bill 47, why have you laid the groundwork to jam it through the House and run away?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would think the deputy House leader would know that there has not

been a time allocation motion introduced in this House. Simply, there are time allocations on the Order Paper, for one. Second, the labour bill is approaching the highest amount of any bill to be debated in this House, right now up towards about two or three on the list of the 30th Legislature. We have been encouraging the NDP to move their amendments for weeks. They have chosen to stall that piece of legislation on second reading. Considering they want to bring that up today, through you, Mr. Speaker, to them, I strongly encourage them to get to work on their amendments because the House will complete its business.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that we would have brought forward amendments to protect workers from losing their jobs after filing a WCB claim, given we would have brought forward amendments to protect health benefits and compensation based on actual lost wages, given that we would like to seek to make clear the duties and responsibilities of officers, supervisors, and others at a time when workers face COVID-related hazards every day, to the same minister: why, in the middle of a pandemic, are you reducing safety, making access to WCB benefits harder, and reducing the amounts of those benefits?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a little rich from the folks across to complain at this point. You know what? We've been in the House for weeks. We've extended the session by an extra week to give the opposition time to do what they've got to do. Now they're complaining because the bill that they think is the most important, they haven't spent time on. They spent time on things that they think are less important. They're so angry that they weren't able to focus on what they think is most important. Now that their anger is catching up with them, they're trying to blame somebody else. They ought to take responsibility.

2:10

Ms Gray: Given that I'm really sorry that this member wants to start his Christmas break on December 8 and given that the amendment currently on the floor would protect front-line health care workers with presumptive PTSD coverage, something that is incredibly important given the state of what's happening in our continuing care centres and in our hospitals, and given that this government bragged in their fact sheets that this change will save them \$230 million, to be very clear, saving money by denying workers coverage that they need to recover, to the same minister: will you commit to doing the right thing, encourage all your colleagues to support our amendment?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, if I was a stakeholder that that hon. member was worried about, I'd be very, very disappointed in the NDP because for several weeks they refused to get to work in Committee of the Whole on this important piece of legislation. In fact, further to that, they have not shared any of their amendments with the government, so clearly, they're not taking it very seriously. That's disappointing. But there's still time. The Legislature is still sitting. Again, through you to them, we're starting to run out of chances, so let's get to work on that legislation because we will get Alberta's...

Ms Hoffman: You could start telling the truth.

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, whether making a comment on the record or off the record, if the Speaker can hear it, it still remains unparliamentary.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

COVID-19 and Care Facility Staffing

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For months we've been pressing this government for a provincial staffing strategy for seniors facilities, but they did nothing but repeat empty talking points about working with operators, the same operators who just paid a rich dividend to their shareholders while COVID-19 ripped through their facilities and hundreds of Albertans died. Now we're deep into the crisis, and this government is suddenly trying to panic-hire 2,000 more people to take untrained jobs as comfort-care aides. So how many lives have been lost in seniors' facilities? Why is the Minister of Health just starting to act now?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yet another ridiculous question from the NDP, who continue to just fearmonger inside this Chamber. Through you to that hon. member: shame on you. We're proud of our Health minister, who has worked tirelessly since COVID-19 arrived inside this country. He's continuing to deal with an unprecedented situation, and we will continue to take action to protect lives and livelihoods. This government fully supports our Health minister. Stay tuned this afternoon to hear more about where Alberta is headed next.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will take no lectures from a minister with a Premier who built their careers on playing politics in fear and smear.

Given seniors are suffering because nurses, health care aides, family members, and volunteers are infected or are forced into isolation and given that continuing care in Alberta is 2,000 people short by the government's own admission, to the minister. You forced Alberta seniors to wait for months while you dithered and stood up for profitable corporations. What exactly is the job description for a comfort-care aide, and when can we expect to see them arrive in seniors' facilities?

The Speaker: One thing that I can tell the member is that if he uses a preamble like that again, not in a round of the first four, we will be moving to the next questioner.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, most of that question is utterly false and continues with the fearmongering. Again, we're going to focus on lives and livelihoods, and I encourage the hon. member to stay tuned for what the Premier and the Health minister have to say this afternoon.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that I would have loved to hear what the Minister of Health might say in question period and given that trained health care aides have been working to exhaustion and beyond for months and putting themselves and their families at risk to serve seniors and given that these heroes can make as little as \$16 an hour in some facilities and given that this government has robbed them of their federal wage top-up, again to the minister: how much will the government of Alberta pay these untrained comfort-care aides, and how quickly do they expect to hire 2,000 of them?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government has invested over \$170 million inside seniors' care during COVID-19, again proving that this government is taking it seriously. We're going to continue to work with Albertans. That is the way to get this province through it. The opposition's approach of playing fear and smear and politics

with people's lives is not going to get it done, but Albertans can rest assured the NDP is not in charge. This government will get it done. We'll stand with them, and we are going to be able to get us through COVID-19.

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

Name-change Legislation in Alberta

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this summer members of this Assembly passed a bill that would prohibit convicted sex offenders from changing their names. I'm proud that this government closed that loophole when it was discovered because our families should feel safe in their own neighbourhoods. However, last week I noticed that a dangerous offender in Edmonton is planning to apply for a legal name change, and that's concerning to me. To the Minister of Service Alberta: will the legislation that you tabled earlier this year protect Albertans from dangerous offenders being allowed to legally change their names?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year, to protect children and vulnerable Albertans, we made legislative changes that banned convicted sex offenders from legally changing their names. Today there are no restrictions prohibiting dangerous offenders from being able to legally change their names, but we're going to change that. I'm very proud of the work that we've done to help Alberta families feel safer in their communities. They deserve to feel safe and confident that convicted sex offenders and other violent criminals are not hiding in our communities or hiding from their past.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has the call.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that only the worst of the worst criminals are given the designation of dangerous offender and given that these vile criminals are not included in the amendments to the legislation and so still have the ability in Alberta to legally change their names and given that ensuring the safety of Alberta families includes protecting them from hardened criminals who show no remorse, will the minister consider expanding the scope of these amendments to prohibit dangerous offenders from being able to legally change their names?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To say it simply: yes, absolutely. As I said earlier, this past summer we closed a loophole to prevent convicted sex offenders from being able to legally change their names. That was a first step. I will be reviewing this legislation to address this issue, and we will take action to prevent dangerous offenders from legally changing their names in the spring. Violent, dangerous offenders should have to live with their names just as the survivors of violent crimes live with their trauma for the rest of their lives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. That's great news. Given that right now dangerous offenders can still apply to legally change their names and given that in Edmonton the dangerous offender Leo Teskey has made it clear that he wants to change his name and hide from his past and his convictions and given that this represents a danger to

adults, children, law enforcement, all based on his criminal history, again to the minister: what can be done to prevent this criminal from being able to change his name?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was also concerned to hear that a monster like Leo Teskey wants to change his name, but let me be clear that our vital statistics legislation provides the registrar with broad discretionary powers to refuse to register a legal change of name. The registrar has the authority to refuse to register a name on objectionable grounds such as when the applicant has been convicted of a violent crime that threatened the lives, safety, or physical or mental well-being of others or when the change of name would cause confusion or mislead the public in any way. I have confidence that Alberta's registrar has the tools needed to deny a legal change of name for individuals who are a danger to public safety.

COVID-19 Cases in Children and Health System Capacity

Ms Pancholi: Since the pandemic began, Albertans have been asking for safeguards to protect our children. Instead, the UCP has provided no financial support, weak leadership, half-hearted guidance for schools and child care, and a Premier who tells the province: don't worry, because only your grandparents will die of COVID-19. Schools reopened unsafely, and thousands of children and families have been rotating through repeated isolation and doing their own contact tracing. Children are getting sick and spreading COVID. Nearly 15,000 children in Alberta have had COVID, including over 2,000 under the age of five. To the Premier: why did your government downplay the risks of COVID-19 to our children?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly would hope that as a former public servant the member opposite would respect those public servants who are working hard every day to keep Albertans safe, including the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, who I truly do believe is the best chief medical officer of health we have in Canada. We have continued to follow her guidance. That is why we've seen that 4 out of 5 of all schools have no cases, and we remain keeping child care, preschools, out of school care open, based on her guidance and what she's seeing in terms of cases and best practices and research around the world.

Ms Pancholi: Given that there are outbreaks at most hospitals in the province and given that AHS is considering treating adults at Alberta's children's hospitals due to the government's mismanagement of the second wave and given that children's hospitals in Ontario are overwhelmed, leaving over 700 families that are waiting for children's health services such as wheelchair fittings, autism supports, and surgeries, to the Minister of Health: if Ontario is delaying children's health services and you're preparing for field hospitals, what is the state of children's health in our province, how many pediatric surgeries and appointments have been delayed, and how many children's lives have you put at risk?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing to see the hon. member go and use fearmongering on what is such an important question. First of all, we're not bringing in field hospitals at the moment. We're working hard to be able to deal with COVID-19 inside our province. Again, simply, the Health minister and the Premier will have more to say this afternoon. The hon. member should stop fearmongering and do her job as a member of the

Official Opposition and ask reasonable questions and stop playing politics with the pandemic.

2:20

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that that answer indicates that children's health is not a priority for this minister or this government and given that 19 children under the age of five have been hospitalized, three in ICUs, and that 38 children between the ages of five and 19 have been hospitalized, five in ICUs, and given that these children and their families are going through hell as these kids gasp for air and beg for their mom or dad, who can't be there because of quarantine or restrictions on visitation, to the Premier: what will it take for this government to take COVID seriously and protect the lives of children? A child died as a result of COVID-19 in Winnipeg last week. Is that what it will take before you'll take our children's health seriously?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would say that, obviously, the death of any Albertan as a result of COVID-19 is something that we take incredibly seriously in this House. Unlike the members opposite, we're going to continue to take the advice of officials like the chief medical officer of health. We think that she's doing an exceptional job. Unlike the members opposite as well, we're not going to speculate. We are going to also balance the excellent advice that we receive. I would encourage the members opposite to take a step back from the politics, to stop creating fear, and to recognize that we also want to balance lives and livelihoods as we navigate this pandemic together.

Ms Hoffman: It's government inaction that's creating fear.

COVID-19 in Schools

Ms Hoffman: Alberta hit another grim milestone yesterday. More than 1,000 schools have sent home notices of COVID-19 cases. On the same day, the UCP decided to bend the rules on who's considered a close contact in school. Now teachers have to try to recall how many minutes they spend close to people infected with the virus. Are you kidding me? This is a ridiculous policy, and it's a clear admission by this government that they don't understand the realities of classrooms or of COVID. Why won't the minister make Alberta schools safer instead of dropping safety standards in schools?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, the member opposite as the former Minister of Health would understand how these things work, that we do take the advice of health officials, and that's exactly what happened here. These processes and assessments of who is a contact are being refined so that teachers are not being forced to quarantine unnecessarily. Previously AHS contact investigation within schools regarded anyone in a classroom with an infectious case to be a close contact and then required to quarantine. This was resulting in many teachers and staff being excluded when they may not have actually had close contact with a student case.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the tapes clearly state otherwise and given that contact tracing in Alberta schools has been completely collapsed – and that has been the work dumped onto educators now because the government has failed to provide appropriate supports – and given that the latest absurd idea from this government is that students and staff somehow run around classrooms with 40 stopwatches around their necks, trying to keep track of how much

time they spend sitting close to each other, when will this government stop reading those ridiculous notes and act in the best interests of students and cap class sizes? Enough excuses.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, once again, the plan that the members opposite continue to criticize was developed by the Minister of Education in partnership with school divisions across the province as well as the chief medical officer of health. Absolutely, the increase in COVID-19 cases has impacted contact tracing. That is why AHS has put a priority on school-aged children, to get information to schools and families faster. They're also working to double their contact tracing teams to have more than 1,600 staff doing this tracing by the end of the year. I, for one, am grateful for the work being done by Alberta Health and AHS officials on this front.

Ms Hoffman: Given that it's parents and principals that are forced to do the contact tracing and given that hundreds of thousands of Alberta students have already been forced to abandon their classrooms because this government chose to prioritize a \$4.7 billion corporate giveaway over capping class sizes, Mr. Speaker – [interjections] it's not a laughing matter, members – and given that the government has now compromised the safety of kindergarten to grade 6 students and staff by abandoning public health guidance, why is the Minister of Education so afraid to sit in this room and answer questions, but she thinks it's safe for children to sit in classrooms and keep track of how many of them have been exposed to COVID?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:24.

The hon. member.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our schools are safe because AHS and the schools are doing an excellent job of protecting students and keeping families informed. I know this. As a parent of a kindergarten child in a school I see how these protocols are followed every single day. Transmission in schools is also low: 4 out of 5 of all schools have had no cases, in-school transmission has occurred in only 1 of 8 schools, and just 1.1 per cent of COVID cases since September have been acquired through in-school transmission. We're going to continue to work with our school division partners, with schools, and with AHS and Alberta Health to keep kids and staff safe.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is the only one with the call.

Licence Plates

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Service Alberta announced changes to Alberta's licence plates. I'm excited to see that a move to get rid of the annual expiry stickers and catch up with other jurisdictions with reflective plates means that our licence plates will be modernized. I received some questions from Albertans, though, that I'd like the minister to answer. Minister, what is a reflective plate, and what will the new plates look like? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, it's a good question. It's one I've heard from a lot of Albertans since we made this announcement this week. First of all, let me be perfectly clear. These new plates will look exactly the same. The design is not changing. What is changing is

that we are moving to reflective plates, and what's exciting about these new plates is that they have enhanced security measures which will prevent fraudulent use of fake plates, and it's also going to make them more visible, which is going to be great for law enforcement as they are keeping our roads safe.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Minister. Given that a change to reflective plates seems like it will probably cost more money and given that many Albertans prefer to keep their plates for years, even decades, rather than replace them every year and that there are millions of Albertans affected by this change, can you please tell us how much it will cost to renew a vehicle registration in 2021 and how the plate replacement will work?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that there will be no change in cost to Albertans when they are registering their vehicle, renewing their registration, or when they are purchasing a new plate. If they are purchasing a plate today, it will be the same price as when they purchase a plate next year with new reflective plates. Also, I'd like to clarify that no Albertan will be forced to change their plate. If you have a plate today and you want to keep it, you can keep it. But starting next year in the fall, when you do choose to get a brand new plate, you will be getting a reflective plate at the same cost as any plate you have purchased before.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's great news. Given that the minister has said that a change to reflective plates enables the use of better technology and given that Alberta drivers and law enforcement are much more used to the current system, that includes a visible sticker at the bottom of their plates, can the minister explain what this technology is, and how does it work?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing around the world is a move by law enforcement to adopt more technology and innovative approaches to doing their job, and one of the ways that they do that is by using automated licence plate reader technology. Those licence plate readers read the whole plate and can integrate with our databases to determine whether that plate represents a vehicle that's properly registered. The move to reflective plates is more visible, is more compatible with these new technologies. It will enable law enforcement to move forward with more innovative approaches as they work so hard to keep Albertans safe. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

COVID-19 Outbreak at the Edmonton Chinatown Care Centre

Mr. Dang: Edmonton's Chinese community is reeling during this COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak in the Edmonton Chinatown Care Centre is still out of control, and yesterday, tragically, six more residents died as a result of this virus. My heart goes out to those families that have lost loved ones. Even with this unspeakable tragedy, we are hearing that little has changed. Family members still are coming in to provide care for their loved ones because of the lack of staff, and COVID-19 continues to spread. To the minister. The residents, staff, and families need help now. What is being done to control the outbreak? How many more people have to get sick before real action will be taken like hiring more staff and rapid testing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than \$260 million has been invested for safety measures at long-term care, designated supportive living facilities, and seniors' lodges. That funding is retroactive to March and will continue into 2021. That funding is for enhanced staffing, cleaning supplies, revenue loss, and the cost of additional precautions if the outbreak occurs and/or continues inside facilities like this. Again, the Health minister will have some more actions that are also taking place across this province with the Premier this afternoon, and I encourage the member to stay tuned for the press conference.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that those communities need help now and given that the Edmonton Chinatown is an interconnected community and that the outbreak in the Chinatown Care Centre impacts the community beyond just its walls and given that Chinatown businesses are already seeing the impact of the outbreak in the surrounding community – Tom Ly, owner of Dynasty restaurant, says that all of Chinatown is feeling the impact of the outbreak: "Once the (news) hits and it says [there was an outbreak at a] Chinatown seniors' home, then people automatically think it's the whole Chinatown . . . then people . . . stay away from the area" – to the Premier: do you realize your failure to protect seniors in the Chinatown Care Centre has had a staggering impact on Chinatown's small businesses as well?

2:30

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, significant action is being taken when it comes to seniors' care inside the province, and it will continue. Alberta Health and AHS are also actively inspecting continuing care facilities all across the province. On-site visits include observations of screening processes, infection prevention and control practices, COVID-19 outbreak implementation and enhanced cleaning plans. Alberta Health and AHS follow up on deficiencies noted at facilities and conduct monitoring visits to ensure full compliance. Again, \$260 million have been invested for safety measures at long-term care, and this government will continue to work with facilities all across the province to protect our most vulnerable.

Mr. Dang: Given that Edmonton's Chinatown is fighting against racism, xenophobia, and misinformation that is fuelling boycotts, vandalism, and even violent attacks against Asian Albertans and Chinese-owned businesses and given that this UCP caucus has clearly bought into this misinformation, with the Minister of Infrastructure claiming that I personally knew where COVID-19 came from because I am of Chinese descent and this Premier's failure to immediately call out the antimask protesters, where known racist groups like the Proud Boys were spreading false information, to the Premier: will you admit that you and your caucus members' actions have amplified racist sentiment and commit immediately to no longer fuelling the misinformation that is destroying . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous. This government condemns any and all racism. That is very, very clear. Actually, what is clear is that the Official Opposition and that member, who was part of a government caucus who admitted that there were investigations done into serious sexual assault issues within their caucus and were able to find out and confirm that several of those issues had actually taken place and have remained quiet – does that hon. member know who it is? We will not be lectured by that hon.

member when it comes to how they manage their caucus inside this place.

Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: Last week Albertans learned that the government is starting to offer coal leases for about 2,000 hectares of land on Alberta's eastern slopes, conveniently right after the Grassy Mountain coal hearings closed. The government was quick to tell Albertans that potentially devastating coal mine projects in the area haven't been approved yet, hardly reassuring given that the government rescinded Premier Lougheed's coal policy without even talking to Albertans. Minister, we all see where this is headed. Why can't you just admit that your grand plan is to proliferate coal mining and destroy our pristine landscapes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the NDP continue to make things up. First of all, the Grassy project was taking place underneath that member and the former government. Second of all, these leases that are in question, that the hon. member is referring to, have nothing to do with the former 1976 coal policy. They're actually in what are called category 2 lands and would not have been impacted by that coal policy. Again, no coal mine has been approved inside this area. Both the federal and the provincial regulators make sure that the strict environmental rules that come to coal development are in place, and they will continue to do so.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given that category 2 lands used to prevent open-pit mining and given that the government is already pushing for more industrial use in the Oldman watershed and given that we've already seen the negative effects on watersheds in the B.C. portion of that valley and given that the Oldman watershed could be used to enable other industrial uses or protect drinking water in southern Alberta and given that there are already a number of coal projects in the area, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: how can you expect Albertans to trust you with protecting our drinking water?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, how can Albertans take anything that that hon. member says when his questions are: "could have", "they might," "I don't know if it's taking place, but it could have"? The conspiracy theories from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar are completely and utterly ridiculous. Again, the regulatory regime is in place so that the Alberta Energy Regulator and the federal regulator when it comes to coal – all environmental rules continue to be followed. In fact, I was proud to sign ministerial orders that protected category 1 lands all across the province from coal development. Again, to the hon. member: please stop fearmongering inside the Assembly.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the people of B.C. know full well that water impacts on mining and given that global steelmakers are looking at replacing coking coal in their steel-making process and given that steel production growth is predicted to level out in 2025, long before any of these coal projects would even come online, and given that the government's diversification as a luxury approach to economic development has so far failed to deliver for Albertans and given that we saw before the pandemic this government lose 50,000 jobs, to the minister: why does your economic plan revolve around dabbling in 19th-century industries like coal mining?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, continuing to watch the NDP attack the hard-working people that work within the coal industry

both inside our province and outside the province is disappointing. Again, I want to be very clear. All environmental rules remain in place inside the eastern slopes, and they will remain in place inside the eastern slopes. The hon. member can't even ask a question inside this Chamber without notes and cannot even adjust his questions when he finds out the things that he's saying are factually wrong. Again, we will not be lectured by an hon. member that wished Margaret Thatcher dead.

Alberta Trades Hall of Fame

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, skilled trades are a vital part of Alberta, and the road to recovery will hinge on having a strong skilled trades workforce. Without them, cars don't run, buildings aren't built or maintained, and even our hair doesn't get cut. That's why in our election platform we committed to recognizing that a skilled trade is as valuable as a degree. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how are tradespeople like myself in Alberta being recognized for the hard work that they do?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his important question. Just last week Alberta's government was proud to announce the first-ever inductees into the Alberta Trades Hall of Fame. The Alberta Trades Hall of Fame recognizes and honours individuals who have made exceptional contributions to advancing the skilled trades, mentoring students, and to supporting the success of others, and this year's inductees have done that and more. From founding Women Building Futures to introducing heavy vehicle technology to the world stage, each inductee has been a trailblazer for trades and apprenticeship education. Skilled tradespeople matter. These professionals and educators help build our province, they help keep it moving forward, and they deserve to be recognized for it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that the value of our tradespeople often goes overlooked and since the Alberta Trades Hall of Fame is dedicated to honouring those that have contributed to Alberta's successes and given that it's a vital part of the province's robust skills for jobs plan to enhance apprenticeship, can the minister please tell Albertans about some of the individuals selected for induction into the hall of fame for this year?

Ms Schulz: "I think education is a great equalizer of opportunity. To me it is a fundamental requirement for us to move our economy ahead." Mr. Speaker, that is a direct quote from one of this year's inductees and speaks to the character of each individual inducted into the Trades Hall of Fame. These are extraordinary people who have made lasting impacts on their profession, their communities, and, most importantly, on future trades workers. On behalf of Alberta's government I'd like to congratulate JudyLynn Archer, Herman Bruin, Doug Golosky, Bobby Harabba, and Eric Newell on their well-earned induction into the Alberta Trades Hall of Fame.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Considering that many may realize a lifelong passion in the trades and given that many young people may not be aware of the opportunities presented through a career in a skilled trade or even that being a part of the Trades Hall of Fame is even possible,

can the minister inform us how people can nominate someone they think should be a part of the hall of fame and what criteria they should meet?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each day Alberta's diverse, intelligent skilled trades professionals and educators get to work building our province and supporting our communities. I want to encourage anyone who knows someone who has made significant contributions to the skilled trades or apprenticeship education to nominate them for the Alberta Trades Hall of Fame. Nomination packages can be found online at www.alberta.ca/athofnomination and submitted throughout the year. The annual deadline to submit nominations is March 1.

Private Investment in Public Infrastructure

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, recently the Minister of Infrastructure announced a new public-private partnership framework and an unsolicited proposal framework and guidance. It is intended to help Alberta's government find alternate ways to build infrastructure, create jobs, and stimulate the economy while making the most of limited taxpayer dollars. While sounding promising, these frameworks are quite technical. To the Minister of Infrastructure: in layman's terms, what do the P3 framework and the USP framework mean?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's recovery plan is needed to boost our economy and get it back on track and given that Alberta's recovery plan is focused on creating jobs while investing back into our province, the Minister of Infrastructure had mentioned that these frameworks will be part of Alberta's economic recovery by providing new ways to get infrastructure built even when we weren't expecting it. We're going to actually listen to the ideas of Albertans.

2:40

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta's recovery plan is needed to boost our economy and get it back on track and given that Alberta's recovery plan is focused on creating jobs while investing back into our province and given that the minister had mentioned that these frameworks will be part of Alberta's economic recovery, to the same minister: how do these frameworks fit in your recovery plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the Minister of Infrastructure these frameworks support Alberta's economic recovery by demonstrating our commitment to attracting private-sector investment, investment that will help launch much-needed public infrastructure, create jobs, and stimulate the economy for all Albertans. There's a dirty little secret the NDP doesn't like to talk about: they don't have a plan when it comes to building infrastructure. They would either have to raise taxes or drive us even further into debt because they really hate the word "private" in public-private partnerships. We, on the other hand, are prepared to work with everybody to get the infrastructure built that Albertans need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that the P3 framework and the USP framework will provide the government greater flexibility to deliver infrastructure while encouraging the private sector to come forward with solutions to help provide infrastructure and given that infrastructure can mean a wide variety of projects that our province needs, to the same minister: can you clarify what kind of projects can be built using the same framework?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a great question, and here's the interesting thing. Since it's an unsolicited proposal, we actually in most cases won't know till it comes in. These frameworks will, however, attract private-sector investment. We invite the private sector to come forward with their ideas and their innovation, whether it's for a highway, a bridge, a transit project, a hospital, a school, an irrigation system. It's up to the imagination of the world out there. Alberta's government will listen and use our successful track record in delivering P3s and other ways of building much-needed infrastructure, and we will do it in partnership with the private sector, in partnership with Albertans, using their great ideas.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Youth Parliament

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to us returning to the remainder of the Routine and providing the 35 seconds of notice that we will be doing that, I would like to make just one brief announcement that I think each of us should be very proud of. The announcement this afternoon: it's come to my attention that two of our young Legislative Assembly employees have been selected to participate in the prestigious Commonwealth Youth Parliament.

This year's session will be held virtually next week, and over 50 young people from around the world are expected to participate and have been selected alongside young Members of Parliament of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branches. It's an opportunity for young people from the Commonwealth to experience aspects of parliamentary democracy and procedure.

They will also convene in a new and innovative setting that reflects the measures that many parliaments have also taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Formal parliamentary practices adopted from several Commonwealth countries' virtual responses to the pandemic will be followed in the proceedings and observed under the watchful eyes of experienced parliamentarian officials.

I'd like to congratulate Rebecca Hicks, a venue services assistant and former page currently attending the U of A bachelor of arts, combined honours in history and English, and Maria Ovcharenko, a former page, an input editor at *Alberta Hansard*, in third-year U of A political science.

It's a very prestigious award. I thought it was of note to be able to congratulate them from the Assembly. I'm sure all members will join me in congratulating them.

In 30 seconds or less we will proceed to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a statement to make.

Parliamentary Discourse and Hope

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to serve the amazing constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-

Vegreville. Families and businesses in my riding have shown tremendous strength and courage in the face of this pandemic, and they have great hope for the future.

After meeting with the people in my riding and hearing their hope, it's always jarring to come to the Chamber and listen to the opposition spread fear and negativity. Of course, this is nothing new. Over the past 19 months I've sat in this Chamber many times and listened to the members opposite say many things, whether true or not, scaring Albertans. Somehow their decorum has gone from bad to worse, to now being a daily onslaught of fear, negativity, and information.

This reminds me of the kids I went to school with in junior high: kids who followed, kids who heckled, kids who bullied because they had nothing constructive to say or do. My mom told me that these kids would eventually grow up. Boy, was she wrong.

What the opposition needs to understand is that Albertans are hopeful people. This Christmas season I have some reflections on hope that I would like to share. Hope is not a feeling; it's a path. We have all faced difficult moments, moments that try the human soul and feel impossible, but hope sees the invisible, feels the intangible, and achieves the impossible.

The story of our province is a story of hope, a story of people who've accomplished impossible things like separating oil from sand, setting off the greatest prosperity boom our country has ever seen. Even in these trying times Albertans believe in themselves and in the province we love and call home. Our government spreads that message of hope every day, even through the darkest times. We introduce legislation that will make Albertans' lives better and easier. We propose common-sense solutions for Alberta's economic recovery. Mr. Speaker, on this side of the aisle we are hopeful for the future, and we will be the leaders Albertans elected us to be.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a petition.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Families Advocating for Compassionate Eldercare, also known as FACE, I'm proud to table this petition with almost 5,000 signatures asking for compassionate care ratios, accountability and regulations, and affordable and compassionate care alternatives for the elder care system in our province. I have the requisite copies.

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member in her presentation of a petition. I'm not sure if it was approved through Parliamentary Counsel, which would make it an official petition. If it hasn't been, we will accept it as a tabling, which would take place in Tabling Returns and Reports, but given that you've tabled it now, that's fine. We'll accept it as a tabling if it isn't technically a petition. I just wanted to put that on the record for you and the signatories.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 211 Municipal Government (Firearms) Amendment Act, 2020

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being the Municipal Government (Firearms) Amendment Act, 2020.

This bill is my private member's bill this session. I'm one of probably very few members in the province who have actually

gotten to table two private member's bills in one sitting, thanks to Bill 206 as well.

This bill itself will enshrine our government's commitment and my commitment, personally, to ensuring that firearms owners are protected in this province. We know that Justin Trudeau is after legally acquired property in this province, and we will not let him have it in our municipalities, and we will make sure that the government of Alberta has the final say in what is going on here.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to table this bill, and I will do so now.

The Speaker: Perhaps you might say that you're very honoured to move first reading as opposed to tabling.

Ms Glasgo: I'm very honoured to move first reading of Bill 211, the Municipal Government (Firearms) Amendment Act, 2020.

[Motion carried; Bill 211 read a first time]

Bill 212 Official Sport of Alberta Act

Mr. Yaseen: Mr. Speaker, I'm so honoured and pleased to move the first reading of private member's Bill 212, the Official Sport of Alberta Act.

This bill would make rodeo Alberta's official sport. I have had the opportunity to live in rural Alberta some 40-plus years ago in conjunction with my oil and gas work. Here I learned and experienced a rich rural culture, a culture of hospitality, generosity, co-operation, and collaboration, with rodeo being the most favourite sport. Rodeo is an important thread in the rich cultural fabric of our province. The rodeo is about competition, entertainment, music, and, of course, the food.

2:50

But I know that at its heart, Mr. Speaker, rodeo is about community. It's about bringing together people from all walks of life, all different backgrounds, immigrants like myself or people who have been here in Alberta for generations like yourself. Our love for rodeo is something we share as Albertans, and I want that to be officially recognized in legislation. As a proud Calgarian I was deeply saddened that the iconic Calgary Stampede had to be cancelled this year. I know I share this with many Albertans, as other rodeos across the province were also cancelled.

I hope this bill will be a small beacon of hope for Albertans as we end this challenging year, 2020, and serve as a reminder that we have much to look forward to. Yahoo, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-North has taken first reading speech lessons from the hon. Minister of Immigration and Labour.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, for clarity's sake, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview earlier rose on a tabling of a petition that has not been accepted as a petition but has been accepted as a tabling.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in accordance with section 86 of the FOIP Act to table the requisite five copies of the FOIP Act annual report for 2019-2020.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of drafts, potential amendments to Bill 47. I'm just interested in adding these to the record and the debate through Tabling Returns and Reports. These are drafts, and this was discussed with the table.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Seeing none, hon. members, we are at – oh, a tabling.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: A tabling to the Clerk.

The Speaker: The tablings to the Clerk are placed in the Clerk's mailbox outside of the regular function of session, which, of course, you're more than welcome to do following the proceedings today because currently we are at points of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: The best time.

The Speaker: I couldn't agree more.

I believe the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika rose on the first point of order today at approximately 2:03. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you acknowledging me and this point of order that I raised at the time that you had mentioned. I rise under Standing Order 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." At that time when the point of order was called, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud clearly said to the Minister of Environment and Parks and Sunde's favourite son, "You're an embarrassment."

Now, you have already talked a lot about the use of words and that in some cases and some contexts they are parliamentary and in other cases they are not. This, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, is a point of order. It is language that is abusive, meant to cause disorder. Frankly, the only embarrassment here is the conduct of the NDP in their attempt to politicize the pandemic. This is not the first time the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has spent time in the point-of-order penalty box, and she has even spent some time in the point-of-privilege purgatory. So it shouldn't be that difficult for that member to simply withdraw, apologize, and improve that member's own decorum in this Chamber.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under this point of order, that has been raised under Standing Order 23(j), I certainly did not hear the member make any of those statements.

I did, however, hear the minister say that we are an embarrassment, that we should be ashamed. In fact, he specifically told the Leader of the Official Opposition, "You should be ashamed," speaking to her directly. I believe he also referred to the worst Finance minister in history. So I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a point of order. There was rigorous debate happening here in this House, and although the government seems to be particularly thin-skinned today, I would argue this was not a point of order but a matter of debate that is critically important given the state of the pandemic in our province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, unless there are other submissions, I am prepared to rule. I do also have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. the Government House Leader approximately shortly before 2:03 said, "Mr. Speaker, you want to know who has failed Albertans?"

Now, all members of the Assembly will know that it is difficult for the Speaker to comment on comments made off the record that were not picked up by the Blues or by *Hansard*.

However, in this case the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud interjected with: "You're the government. Start acting like it." The minister continued: "The Official Opposition, who at this point may be the worst Official Opposition in the history of this province. That hon. member in particular, who we know" is already the worst Finance minister in the province of Alberta's history. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo interjected with: "You got him right beside you." The minister proceeded: "[He] now moved to the opposition benches to continue the behaviour that he had in government, which is . . . [fearmongering] and [doing] nothing on behalf of the people of Alberta and instead to play politics and practise the politics of fear and smear." The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo: "Deficit leader." The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and perhaps honourable in this use is maybe not ideal: "You're an embarrassment." The hon. minister continued: "This side of the House is not going to do that. Shame on the NDP, Mr. Speaker. We're going to move forward for Albertans." A point of order was called.

I would suggest that all members will know that on pages 619 and 620 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* it states the following: "Remarks which question a Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order. A Member will be requested to withdraw offensive remarks, allegations, or accusations of impropriety directed towards [a] Member."

I think it's reasonable, given the evidence of the Blues, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods will withdraw the remarks on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Making statements like "You're an embarrassment" is unparliamentary.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud I withdraw.

Mr. Schow: That's a W.

The Speaker: I don't need any help from the Member for Cardston-Siksika boasting or gloating about how many points of order he may or may not have won, and it's certainly not behaviour becoming of a deputy government whip.

The second point of order was called by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Referring to the Absence of a Member

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order. I'll refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 619, where it refers to:

Allusions to the presence or absence of a Member or Minister in the Chamber are unacceptable. Speakers have upheld this prohibition on the ground that "there are many places that Members have to be in order to carry out all of the obligations that go with their office."

Mr. Speaker, I would also point out that the need for members to be in other places at this moment is even more because of the pandemic. You can look across this room right now. We are not sitting in normal spots. We are having to go out of our way to space between each other. Both the Official Opposition – I thank them for that – as well as the government are taking great steps to do that. The reality of that is that you cannot bring every minister into the Chamber even if every minister was available. That's what we agreed to to keep members safe for the pandemic.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora in her question at the time referred to the absence, first of all, of the minister and, second, said that she was scared to be in the Chamber to answer questions. I will point out to you that the hon. Education minister is certainly not scared of anybody. I've known her a long time. She has been in this Chamber many times to answer questions repeatedly over the last two years and will be back as well, Mr. Speaker. Referring in any way or even alluding to the fact that she is absent from this Chamber is certainly out of order. Again, I want to reiterate that it's certainly, in my view, doubly inappropriate when this House is working together to create space to keep all members safe. The reality is that not all members of cabinet can be inside this Chamber.

3:00

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this point of order to suggest that this is not a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate. The topic at hand was capping class sizes. In this case the Government House Leader has simply pointed out that we have capped the size of the class here in the Legislature. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora was simply referring to that.

That being said, I will defer to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I appreciate the comments by both the Government House Leader and the Deputy Opposition House Leader. I want to make something perfectly clear to members of the Assembly. I take no pleasure in calling members, individually or collectively, to order. In fact, the very best House for a Speaker in our system is one in which they are not needed or at least not called upon to call members to order. On a number of occasions I felt it necessary to call members of the House to order today. Sometimes that's on the government side, and regularly it's on the opposition side. It is important to note that I take no pleasure in doing that, and I would prefer the alternative arrangements to be made.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora made this statement. "Why is the Minister . . . so afraid to sit in this room and answer questions?" It certainly implies that she is not in this room, which is a point of order. The hon. member can withdraw her remarks, and we can consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ms Hoffman: I'm happy to do so, Mr. Speaker. Withdrawn and apologized.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I appreciate the prompt apology. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded, which brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has the call.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, before I move Government Motion 53, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 32(2) and (3) to reduce the interval of the division bells to one minute, including the first division in Committee of the Whole.

The Speaker: Hon. members, for clarity's sake, the Government House Leader is requesting unanimous consent. I'm sorry. For what duration of time?

Mr. Jason Nixon: For now, let's stick with supertime, to 6 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 35

53. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 35, Tax Statutes (Creating Jobs and Driving Innovation) Amendment Act, 2020, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Chamber for that. I'd like to move Government Motion 53.

We have several things on the Order Paper, including this particular legislation, Bill 35, which have been in place in this Chamber for weeks and that the NDP have continued to filibuster to slow down despite the fact that they continue to indicate publicly that their main goal is to get to work on Bill 47 and begin to move their amendments. We have been indicating to the Official Opposition that we would like to give them the opportunity to do so for weeks now. Unfortunately, they have not been moving forward with that. It is my hope that by moving some of this other stuff out of the way, we will be able to get the Official Opposition back to work, Mr. Speaker.

We will always respect the Official Opposition's role in this place, Mr. Speaker, but at the end of the day, it is the Government House Leader's job to be able to make sure that when legislation has stalled out, the people's House will be able to continue with work and that the majority, ultimately, will be able to vote on the legislation inside the Chamber.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Government Motion 53. Is there anyone else wishing to speak to it? There is the opportunity for one member of the Official Opposition to respond.

The hon. the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate but it's not surprising to see this UCP government taking steps to close down the legislative session, to close down debate in this House. I think, clearly, they are trying to hide from accountability. They're trying to hide from the scrutiny of this House, and I must add that this House is designed to do that. The impact of this motion is that it will shut down debate in this House.

As the people's representatives, as Albertans' representatives I think we are elected to come here and debate on issues that matter to our constituents. In this session we debated 15 pieces of legislation. We passed 11 pieces of legislation – 37 stages in 24 days – and there was a reason that this bill didn't get through, because this bill deals with the government's plan to hand out \$4.7 billion to the wealthiest corporations, that has not created any jobs as promised by the government, that didn't bring back investment to Alberta as promised by this government.

Instead, what we know about this plan, what we heard from stakeholders, what we heard from our constituents about this plan is that 50,000 jobs were lost after this piece of policy was introduced, this \$4.7 billion was introduced. We saw a doubling of the deficit. We saw that the economy shrank by .6 per cent. And that was all prepandemic. Right now there are 290,000 Albertans out of work. There is enough evidence. There are enough people and stakeholders out there providing that evidence that this policy is clearly not working. Instead, this policy has resulted in less revenue for the government and more cuts to education and other services like AISH and PDD because government created that \$4.7 billion hole in their budget.

Now they're bringing this motion to curtail debate on this important piece of legislation. I don't think that they are doing any service to Albertans, any service to this Legislature. This Legislature is not here to rubber-stamp the government policies, government bills. We are here to debate those on behalf of all constituents, on behalf of all Albertans. That's simply undemocratic and, I guess, shameful for the government to bring forward this motion in the middle of a pandemic about a policy that clearly doesn't work.

I urge all members of this House that your first and foremost responsibility is not to your government; it's to your constituents. This policy has resulted in job loss. It didn't create investment. It didn't bring back investment. It didn't bring back prosperity. Vote against this motion. Vote for democracy. Vote for debate in this House, and vote for debate on this important piece of legislation because, after all, it's Albertans' money. It's \$4.7 billion. It's a heck of a lot of money, so we should be able to debate that with as much time as we need to debate it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 53 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:09 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Luan	Rutherford
Allard	Madu	Savage
Copping	McIver	Schow
Dreeshen	Nally	Schulz
Glubish	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Gotfried	Nicolaides	Toews
Hunter	Nixon, Jason	Turton
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Walker
LaGrange	Panda	Wilson

Against the motion:

Dang	Hoffman	Sabir
Eggen	Pancholi	Shepherd
Ganley		

Totals:	For – 27	Against – 7
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[Government Motion 53 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 46

55. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2), is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do rise to move Government Motion 55. I refer you to my comments in *Hansard* on Government Motion 53.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Official Opposition has up to five minutes to respond to a government motion. As such, the hon. the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again this government is using these heavy-handed tactics to close down debate on this important piece of legislation. Inasmuch as these closure motions shouldn't be used to curtail debate – they are not democratic – they are doing so on a bill that weakens Albertans' privacy rights. That's not us saying it; that's Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner saying that this piece of legislation will weaken Albertans' health privacy rights. It's the independent officer of this Legislature who is asking this government to shelve this piece of legislation. They did not answer anything that the office of the Privacy Commissioner asked this government to do. It was quite a lengthy letter, and they identified very clearly that this piece of legislation will take things away from AHS and make the Minister of Health in charge of all Albertans' health records. This will weaken Albertans' privacy rights, and it's deeply concerning not only that government refuses to listen to the office of the Privacy Commissioner, not only that government refuses to consult Albertans; they're now moving ahead with a closure motion so that they can shut down debate, so that they can shut down everyone from talking about this important piece of legislation. That's truly shameful.

I will urge all members of this House that this piece of legislation impacts every single Albertan. This legislation weakens the privacy rights of every Albertan. They are your constituents. You're elected by them to stand up, to protect their interests, and instead of standing up for the government agenda, stand up for your constituents. Vote against this motion because this bill is an important one. It must be debated. Government must listen to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and government should not use these undemocratic tactics to curtail debate on this piece of legislation. I urge all my colleagues to vote down this government motion and stand up for Albertans, stand up for your constituents. They elected you. You're accountable to them, not this government.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 55 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:18 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Luan	Savage
Allard	Madu	Schow
Copping	McIver	Schulz
Dreeshen	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Glubish	Nicolaides	Toews
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	Turton
Hunter	Nixon, Jeremy	Walker
Issik	Panda	Wilson
LaGrange	Rutherford	

Against the motion:

Dang	Hoffman	Sabir
Eggen	Pancholi	Shepherd
Ganley		

Totals:	For – 26	Against – 7
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[Government Motion 55 carried]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 48

59. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 48, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2), is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I will refer you to my comments in regard to Government Motion 53 within *Hansard*.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under Standing Order 21(3) there is an opportunity for a response. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a pattern from this government that they will limit the debate on anything and everything that they think they have not consulted on, that they think Albertans are opposed to, and they are doing that in the middle of a pandemic with a bill that amends more than 10 pieces of legislation. It's an omnibus piece of legislation.

One, they limited debate on this piece of legislation by putting together 10, 12 pieces of legislation, of significant changes, in one bill, and now they are moving to limit the debate. They will go to any length to curtail the debate. They cancelled three weeks of morning sittings this session. The only reason that you can think of is that either they don't like to work in the morning, or they don't want any debate on these important pieces of legislation. [interjections] And they are laughing. It's not a laughing matter. There are many people who would like to come work in the morning, like many Albertans who do that and deal with other responsibilities, family responsibilities, children responsibilities in the evening. They would prefer to debate these things in morning hours.

The government cancelled debate for three weeks, and now they're moving this motion so they can curtail debate and ram through the changes that they didn't consult on, that impact many Albertans, that take powers away from municipalities who they didn't consult. That's undemocratic.

Again, to all members of this House: we all have a vested interest in our institution of democracy. These kinds of tactics undermine democracy. When you limit and curtail debate, you undermine democracy. As representatives of Albertans I think that's first and foremost your responsibility to stand up for your constituents, to stand up for those who elected you, to stand up to protect these institutions. I urge all members to vote against this motion. It curtails debate. It curtails democracy. It's undemocratic, and it's shameful.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 59 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:27 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Luan	Savage
Allard	Madu	Schow
Copping	McIver	Schulz
Dreeshen	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Glubish	Nicolaides	Toews
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	Turton

Hunter	Nixon, Jeremy	Walker
Issik	Panda	Wilson
LaGrange	Rutherford	

3:30

Against the motion:

Dang	Hoffman	Sabir
Eggen	Pancholi	Shepherd
Ganley		

Totals:	For – 26	Against – 7
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[Government Motion 59 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 46

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions to be offered with respect to this bill? We are currently on amendment A3. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, considering the very undemocratic constraints that we have imposed upon us here, I will keep my comments brief but succinct and very pointed as well. This bill is a compromise to the integrity of individuals' health records, and I can tell you that that is a fundamental breach of trust that each Albertan employs when we use and engage in our public health system. I can't help but think that this is a direct way by which to open the door to American two-tier style health care, where you make your money off insurance and making a bet on how a person's health is and the state of their health. If you have pre-existing conditions and the insurance companies get that information, you are going to pay an awful lot of money, or you will be excluded from getting your health services, quite frankly. This is why in the United States, for example, it costs between 10 and 15 times more to deliver any given procedure compared to Canada.

This whole notion that we can somehow put the health records and allow that information to move across borders, to move to different jurisdictions, to be handled by third-party contractors: again it speaks volumes about the attitude of this UCP government towards health care. They are here to systematically dismantle it and to make money off it. You can make a lot of money off human misery, Mr. Chair. You can make a lot of money because people will pay, of course, when their loved one needs medical services. They will pay – of course, you'll sell your house, you'll do whatever you can if your child or someone, your loved one, is sick, and private health care profits off that. That's why we built a public system in the first place. That's why we maintain the integrity of our health records.

That's why I think that this bill is absolutely despicable, and I would encourage all members to vote against it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate on amendment A3?

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving on to Bill 46, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton–City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I did seem to hear a bit of hesitation in the government in voting down that last amendment, so perhaps we should try another and roll the dice. I do have another amendment that I would like to put forward, and I will wait for that to reach you.

The Deputy Chair: This will be amendment A4.

Hon. member, if you could please read it into the record for the benefit of all those here.

As always, there will be copies provided at each table at the entrances. Of course, if you'd like a copy, you can raise your hand, and it will be delivered to you. Again, this will be A4.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton–City Centre could continue.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To read it into the record: that Bill 46, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2), be amended by striking out section 63.

This is referring, Mr. Chair, to the section of this bill which removes the requirement for Alberta Health, the ministry, Alberta Health Services, and the Health Quality Council of Alberta to perform a privacy impact assessment for changes that are made to privacy legislation, for elements that are brought in, basically anything new that is handling private health information in the province of Alberta, be that software, be that a new system, be that a new program, be that allowing any new user access, to provide that protection for Albertans. Now, we have heard loud and clear from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, independent officer of the Legislature, that this legislation, in fact, needs serious work, so we're bringing forward this amendment, an amendment that would remove the exemption for Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, Health Quality Council of Alberta to do privacy impact assessments when it comes to the sharing of health information.

As members of this Chamber would know well or at least I certainly hope they would know well – I would hope that they have read the substantive letter that was written by the commissioner to the Minister of Health outlining her significant concerns with this legislation. She was very clear in that letter about how problematic this legislation is. Indeed, in respect to this specific issue she wrote publicly, "I cannot stress more emphatically my concerns." She went on to say, "The duty to complete a [privacy impact assessment] offsets risks to broad sharing of Albertans' health information without [their] consent." Obviously, there is a serious issue here, and I do believe we should continue to listen to these cautionary words from the independent officer of this Legislature, to whom we have entrusted the work of safeguarding Albertans' privacy.

Indeed, just last Friday – as a member of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I look around this room, and I see members who were there at that very meeting and heard these words directly from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, where she went even further than she did in her letter to the minister. She spoke through that committee to all of us here in this Legislature and stated her serious concerns around the transparency of the government's initiatives enabled by this legislation. I encourage all members to take the opportunity to read those words, words which I had hoped to share in this House, but given this government's decision that they want to run and hide and not debate this substantive and dangerous legislation that they brought in front of this House, I will forgo that.

This Legislature does have a decision to make. Do we respect the privacy rights of Albertans? Are we going to listen to the experts?

Are we going to reflect back what our constituents are in fact telling us, which is that we should be hitting pause on these unconsulted sweeping changes? We can, we must do better, and no Albertan, in my view, voted for the release of their private health information. No Albertan voted for watering down the safeguards that are there to protect them, yet that is exactly what we have in this bill, which this government is endeavouring to rush through in the midst of a pandemic.

3:40

They've been unclear about their intent, Mr. Chair, but I do know that this legislation as it's currently written infringes on the privacy rights of Albertans, puts at risk their private health information. This Legislature should not let that happen, so I urge all members of the Chamber to accept this amendment and ensure that privacy impact assessments continue to be made whenever we are looking at the sharing of Albertans' private health information.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A4. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton–Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to members for the opportunity to debate this important amendment. There are many bills that are problematic this session, but this is one of the bills where the independent officer of this Legislature, who works for all of us, has written to request that we do not proceed with this bill. The independent officer of the Legislature, who we have appointed and wasn't just appointed under this Legislature or under the last Legislature but has been in place for at least three Legislatures, who was appointed under a PC government and has served all three parties and all members of the Assembly as an independent officer of the Legislature, has raised the alarms on this piece of legislation.

Taking the time to undo some of the worst pieces that are in it, pieces that specifically undermine the protection of personal and private information, would be in our best interests as members of this Assembly, not just as people who are voting on a specific piece of legislation. We are here to make laws that will stand, hopefully, in perpetuity. The types of alarms that have been raised on this bill at this time are similar to the ones that were raised with regard to Bill 10 in the spring. The government in the spring chose to move forward full speed ahead on a piece of legislation where people outside of this Legislature as well as inside of this Legislature were saying: slow down; put the brake on; wait; make sure you don't overreach. The government chose to overreach, and instead it created a whole new mess for the government that involved people filing actions against the government, the government forming a special committee, the government undoing parts of their legislation.

This is an opportunity today, in this amendment, to say: "We've learned from the spring. We're pulling the brake. We're going to look at the evidence. We're going to actually work with the independent officer of the Legislature, make sure that we get this right and that we're not overreaching on what is appropriate for information sharing with the people of Alberta but also that we're not going to waste more government time, resources, and dollars, in court or otherwise, having to undo mistakes that this House has made because this government was so strong headed in moving forward with their original draft."

This is an opportunity to act on the information that was given to all of us to make this bill less problematic. It would be wise of us to accept this amendment and move forward acknowledging the

expert advice of the independent officer of this Legislature and her recommendations for all of us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A4. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had the pleasure to speak to this bill a few times in Committee of the Whole. I've said this a couple of times, and I will continue to highlight it, that the amendments that are being brought forward today under the name of the Member for Edmonton-City Centre are all thoughtful amendments, not driven by any partisan or political perspective. There's no difference of policy or politics on these issues unless the government is prepared to explain what their intent is, because given the information that we have received from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner about the errors, in some cases – and we're being generous, perhaps, by saying that they're errors – of the changes that they're making to allow for greater disclosure without consent of Albertans' personal, private health information, it can only be assumed that that was not intentional because we have not yet heard from the Minister of Health. I guess we're not going to because the government has invoked closure on this, so we've only got a limited amount of time.

It is not yet clear why the Minister of Health or this government believes that it should not subject the process of managing Netcare, which is incredibly personal health information, to a privacy impact assessment, Mr. Chair. We have not heard the reason why. These amendments are very thoughtful and brought forward as a result of the recommendations that came forward from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

A privacy impact assessment, Mr. Chair, for those who may not be aware, is a process of analysis that is undertaken by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to help identify and address potential privacy risks as a result of a new legislative scheme; in this case Alberta Health, for example, taking over responsibility for Netcare and potentially doing other things that it's not normally doing and not doing right now with Netcare, including, obviously, we know, that there is an intent behind this bill to allow for other authorized users outside of the jurisdiction of Alberta to have access to Albertans' health information. The process of a privacy impact assessment is simply to look at what government or any body is doing with respect to a new legislative scheme and say: look, let's identify those risks; let's identify the risks to privacy and security.

We have an interest in making sure that we can get ahead of those issues, and that's the expertise that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner brings. She understands where those risks lie. She has a great deal of expertise and experience. She's overseen and provided judgment on a number of security breaches, and this is the benefit that that process brings. It is of benefit to the government, it is of benefit to Albertans to know that any potential security and privacy risks have been identified and potentially addressed. That is the purpose of a privacy impact assessment. Yet in Bill 46 we see that the government has said that, no, they don't have to complete that. I simply am confounded as to why. Why does the government not want to undertake a privacy impact assessment? It is to the benefit of all of us, Mr. Chair.

Again, this is a thoughtful amendment. It is not intended to be partisan in nature. I think we can all agree, across partisan lines, that we believe in the security and protection of privacy around health information. By failing to answer, by failing to speak up and to explain why they're removing themselves from the requirements of

privacy assessments, which, I have to say, Mr. Chair, in looking at Bill 46, was deliberate – it is a deliberate drafting change to exclude the government of Alberta and the Minister of Health and the Ministry of Health from a privacy impact assessment. What is the motivation behind that? We have yet to hear that. I think it is a reasonable thing to suggest: let's put that process back in place.

Privacy impact assessments, by the way, Mr. Chair, are often advisory. They're recommendations. They're certainly not meant to tie the minister's hands or the ministry's hands. If they have good reasons as to why they're taking certain actions, they can discuss that, work that through with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. There is nothing about a privacy impact assessment that should be detrimental to anything that the government seeks to achieve by bringing forward Bill 46 unless – and we can reach no other conclusion – this government does want to subject Albertans' health information to greater risk and breach of privacy. That is the only explanation we have so far, and if that is not the case, if the government does not intend to create additional risks to the privacy of Albertans' private, personal health information, then they should support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate on amendment A4? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment, raised by my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre. Let me be very clear. This is not a partisan issue. This is not an issue that is divided on partisan lines. This is an issue that has been raised by the independent office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner here in Alberta. When we hear from the Information and Privacy Commissioner about how problematic this current legislation is, when we hear from an independent officer of this Legislature that she "cannot stress more emphatically [her] concerns," I'm particularly concerned with the direction this government is taking.

I applaud this amendment because I think it does address those concerns. It does ensure that we bring back safeguards such as the privacy impact assessment. We know that this government is not interested in bringing in safeguards around foreign organizations controlling Albertans' data and foreign organizations having access to Albertans' data, but when we deal with organizations that are within Alberta such as the Alberta Health Quality Council, such as Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health, when we do this sharing of information, we have the opportunity here to ensure that we have the proper safeguards and measures in place.

3:50

The Information and Privacy Commissioner specifically spoke to some of the technical requirements and technical aspects of her role. I think those are particularly important, because when we look at how information is shared, how data sharing works, when Alberta Health transmits information to the Health Quality Council of Alberta, when Alberta Health receives information from Alberta Health Services, when those data transfers happen, it's important that we recognize that there are technical considerations.

One of those very significant technical considerations is anonymization of data, right? When we talk about data – for example, when we're dealing with the current global pandemic – when we're dealing with the current pandemic, one of the things it's ensuring is that as information is transmitted, when we're counting up right now the current daily new cases, the current daily new deaths, the current daily new total cases, when we look at

information like that, anonymization of data is so essential because it allows us to share information with researchers. It allows us to share information with academics, with institutions that are going to be able to help with public health, with Alberta Health, that's doing public health modelling. That's information that's going to help us react more appropriately to the pandemic.

So when Alberta Health and public health make recommendations, they are using Alberta Health Services data. They are using information that at its source is identifiable. At the source, when it's collected, it's identifiable, and it will have real impact if that data is misused. It will have real impacts. For example, during this pandemic, during this COVID-19 pandemic, if the data is misused, it could have repercussions in terms of people being mistreated at work. They could be mistreated if they try to enter businesses. They could be tormented on social media. There are real consequences for Albertans if this information is attributed improperly.

So when we look at the Information and Privacy Commissioner specifically saying that they have people of technical background who can look at these systems and look at the processes in which information is shared organization to organization, who can look at how Alberta Health Services transmits that data to Alberta Health and public health, transmits that data to institutions that can do research, it's important that we recognize these concerns are not hypothetical. These concerns are happening right now. The very changes that are being discussed have impacts on the data we are processing right now, the information that in about eight minutes here will be presented by Dr. Deena Hinshaw to all of Alberta, the new daily case numbers that are going to be transmitted to all of Alberta in about eight minutes. That information needs to be anonymized to protect Albertans, to protect their privacy rights, to protect their individual rights, to protect their safety.

Mr. Chair, what the government is suggesting is that those privacy impact assessments should no longer be done. They're not just suggesting it; they're legislating it. They're asserting that we no longer need these privacy impact assessments. But we know that that's not true. Albertans know that that's not true. We know that personal and private health records are confidential and are the property of and do belong to Albertans. This government does not have the right to disclose that information. This government does not have the right to give consent on behalf of Albertans that that information go out. And the Information and Privacy Commissioner thinks that this is a particularly concerning measure.

Mr. Chair, we're not saying that the government will intentionally misuse this data. We're not saying that the government or Alberta Health Services or Alberta Health or the Health Quality Council of Alberta will intentionally misuse this information. But if we don't have people with technical backgrounds like the Information and Privacy Commissioner doing these reviews and ensuring that these processes are put in place, if we don't have these safeguards and checks in place, then misuse of the information may occur inadvertently, because it is all too easy for organizations to improperly transmit information, to improperly anonymize information, to improperly transmit information in a way that may be deanonymized. We see that happening all the time.

Mr. Chair, we see these mistakes happen all the time, and that's why it's essential that we have experts reviewing this. It's why we have experts reviewing these processes and reviewing these systems. Systemic errors are very hard to identify. It's very hard to realize it, and that's why you need technical expertise brought into the loop on this, so that you've got somebody who's outside of the organization reviewing these processes, having safeguards and checks and balances time and time again.

That's something that, again, is not just the opinion of this opposition, it's not just the opinion of my colleague who has introduced the amendment, my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre here, but indeed is actually the opinion of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, an independent officer of this Legislature, who, Mr. Chair, has said again and again that as this legislation is currently drafted, it infringes on the privacy rights of Albertans, it reduces the rights of Albertans, it diminishes the rights of Albertans, and this Legislature should not and cannot let that happen. So we must accept this amendment, and I look forward to hearing from more of my colleagues.

Really, there are real impacts. We see that every single day in this place. We see that every single day in the daily updates right now on COVID, that if the information was improperly transmitted, we would have significant ramifications for every single Albertan.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A4. Are there any members wishing to – I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. To respond to this amendment, I believe that there are some significant positive impacts of sharing this personal information. I understand the concerns brought forward by the members opposite, but I'd like to ask four simple W questions I learned in elementary school.

Who? This data being shared: who is it being shared with? I believe the act still includes the definition of a custodian and who that would be and who that would be defined as and who that would be generated for.

I will come back to that, but the second question is: where? I myself, like many other Albertans, often like to enjoy travelling outside the boundaries of our wonderful province into other jurisdictions, whether that's other provinces, states, or other nations around the world. They may have some significant need to access that information if you are travelling; for instance, if you were travelling to the United States and you happened to get into an accident of some sort.

Many questions that I've learned over the time of being married to my wife, who is a nurse, things that could impact the need for this kind of information – this is the why question, Mr. Chair. Medical professionals may need to know your blood type. That could be quite critical in a medical emergency. They would need to know any allergies. My wife happens to be allergic to penicillin. If she's given penicillin, which is a very common intervention with all kinds of medical emergencies, it could be significantly hazardous to her life.

There are other health conditions that medical officers would need to know in their treatment of whatever could happen to you, and as we've often discussed in the House, time is often a factor in responding to whatever that medical emergency could be. Having to go through significant hoops and jumps and take time to do that could significantly compromise the treatment that one could receive.

When? That is the last question I just want to speak to in terms of that information. Often, if you're in a medical emergency, you could be alone. You could be unconscious. You could be unable to respond for yourself due to that medical emergency, something as simple and perhaps as deadly as a bee sting if you're allergic to that.

So those are some of the cases why and wherefore this data would need to be shared in an appropriate, safe, and protected manner. To the members opposite: yes, protecting the privacy of Albertans' health information is and always will be a priority to the government of Alberta. These amendments would not change

Alberta's obligations under the act to safeguard patient health information. In fact, the proposed amendments include tougher penalties for inappropriate access to a person's health information as well as the breach reporting requirements that already exist.

While, with all due respect, I understand the letter from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, that this information should be protected and taken care of – I do agree with that – I do also agree that timely and quick access for jurisdictions outside of the realm of Alberta should be considered. In my opinion, I will not be supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen on amendment A4.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just respond quickly to the comments from the Member for Lethbridge-East, which, unfortunately, did not address anything in the amendment that's in front of us, which is about restoring privacy impact assessments, that the government is removing. I appreciate his remarks, though. I would like to just comment on them briefly.

In terms of who, as I addressed in previous amendments, there are serious gaps in terms of the definitions here. The definition of a custodian, yes, still remains, but an authorized user is left fairly blank and indeed who now is consolidating all of this power in the hands of the minister. Before, it was more in the realm of the independent through Alberta Health Services. So there is a significant change in the who.

In terms of the where, indeed we all enjoy travelling outside of Alberta, but this is not limited simply to that circumstance in which Albertans still, currently, receive medical care when they are out of country. That currently exists and currently takes place, and certainly improving that is a good thing, Mr. Chair. But this also opens up access by any organization outside Alberta if the minister deems it fit, not under specific medical circumstances like the member was just speaking of. Speaking of the "Where?", if a breach occurs or if there is something that is done inappropriately with that information, there is no protection for that Albertan. None.

4:00

Now, I can appreciate that maybe the member feels he would be willing to take that gamble in an emergency situation, but this is not limited to that. That is the first time anybody in this House has mentioned that circumstance. Certainly, the minister has never mentioned that as a reason or intent for bringing forward this bill.

Why? Well, I think we just touched on that again. There's a lot of "Why?" here, Mr. Chair, outside of that one very specific targeted instance the member just mentioned, and "When?" Indeed, I recognize time is of the essence in that one very specific instance. But the biggest question is: why was none of this discussed with the Information and Privacy Commissioner? Why is the government cutting her out of the loop entirely? If this is so essential and so important and so innocuous, certainly that conversation could have been brief, focused, and they could have brought forward legislation which would not endanger the health information of Albertans and certainly would have clearly understood the value of a privacy impact assessment and why the government should not be exempting itself from doing that due diligence on the part of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on A4. Are there any members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, on the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:02 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Dang	Hoffman	Sabir
Eggen	Pancholi	Shepherd
Ganley		

Against the motion:

Aheer	LaGrange	Rutherford
Allard	Luan	Savage
Copping	McIver	Schow
Dreeshen	Neudorf	Schulz
Glubish	Nicolaides	Toews
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	Turton
Hunter	Nixon, Jeremy	Walker
Issik	Panda	Wilson

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 24
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[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill.

Mr. Shepherd: We'll make one last attempt to make this bill, this bad bill, a little better and restore some of the protections this government seems intent on stripping from Albertans when it comes to their private health information. I have one more amendment, which I will send to you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

This will be referred to as amendment A5. As always, same procedure: there are copies at the tables, and if you put up your hands, you can receive one.

If the hon. member could please read it in for the record for the benefit of everybody listening and here. Again, it will be amendment A5. The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am moving that Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2), be amended in section 68 (a) by renumbering clause (a) as clause (a.1) and (b) by adding the following immediately before clause (a.1):

- (a) by adding the following immediately after subsection (2)(b):
 - (b.1) to make accessible, or attempt to make accessible, health information in contravention of this Act,
 - (b.2) to limit accessibility, or attempt to limit accessibility, to health information in contravention of this Act.

Now, Mr. Chair, page 5 of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's letter to the Minister of Health outlines her significant concerns with the changes to expressed wishes of Albertans when it comes to their private information. She notes that

the expressed wishes provision is extremely important to the operation of Netcare. Without being able to consent, this is the last measure of control an Albertan has over what health information is made available via Netcare.

The last measure of control that an Albertan has over their private health care information.

As it currently stands, the Health Information Act includes a provision that requires a custodian to consider an Albertan's expressed wishes about how much of their health information should be made available during Netcare and that their expressed wishes are currently met where an authorized custodian decides to limit the information made available by applying a global mask to that individual's health information. The commissioner is quite clear in her letter that the removal of this section, the amendment that this government is making to the act in regard to expressed wishes, presents serious issues for health services that are provided outside of Alberta. It's right here on page 5.

4:10

Now, perhaps the government, in an attempt to clean up the legislation, just inadvertently removed this requirement to consider the expressed wishes of patients, or perhaps it is actually the government's intent. So far they haven't been clear. We have heard very little from the minister in this Chamber about his actual intent on a sweeping change to this bill about which there is a great deal of question and about which serious questions have been raised by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I appreciate, Mr. Chair, that we are in the midst of a global pandemic, and I appreciate that the minister has many important responsibilities. But if he is too busy to stand and justify a bill this significant, he is too busy to be moving this bill right now. This government should be listening to the Information and Privacy Commissioner in pulling this bill from this House and engaging in the robust consultation that should have taken place and has not. Indeed, she says here quite clearly:

I request that detailed consultation be held with health service providers and my office on this amendment and the development of related regulations.

So this amendment is important, and the amendment that I'm bringing forward, let me be clear, ensures that a person making health information accessible will have to consider the wishes of the relevant person/patient in terms of making their health information accessible. At a time when this government has been speaking very loudly about wanting to respect the rights of Albertans, the essential need for them to do so, to the point that they are balancing lives and livelihoods based on that consideration, I do not understand why in this particular case they are removing this right for Albertans. At its core this amendment is about protecting Albertans' privacy rights. If the person that is making this health information accessible doesn't consider the wishes of a relevant person/patient, then under this amendment they will be guilty of an offence.

I think that is appropriate, Mr. Chair. The Member for Lethbridge-East spoke about the increased penalties that the government is bringing in. In this case they are removing it with no explanation and no justification against the recommendation of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This is complex legislation – I get it – but I think this is an incredibly important fix. Without this amendment, the expressed wishes of Albertans could be ignored and, critically, the Information and Privacy Commissioner will not have the power, the jurisdiction to step in and protect the privacy rights of that individual, of individual Albertans. I can't imagine a scenario where this government would want to ignore the expressed wishes of Albertans when it comes to their health information, but here we are in the midst of a pandemic with a bill that does precisely that. So I bring this amendment forward to rectify that problem.

I know that we don't always agree on a lot in this Chamber, but I would hope that this is one thing that we could agree on, that the expressed wishes of Albertans when it comes to their private health

information is important, is essential, and should be upheld, so I urge all members to support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

On amendment A5 I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this amendment. We have of course moved a number of amendments to this bill, and most of them centre around the same thing. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has significant concerns about this bill and was not consulted. The minister stated that he did consult with her, which she pointed out was incorrect, shall we say. So this is another attempt to put walls around the private health information of Albertans, to ensure that that information is protected, and in this case to ensure that a custodian is in a position to do a review in accordance with the expressed wishes of an individual. I think we've heard loud and clear from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who is an independent officer, who works not only for all of us in this Chamber but for every Albertan, that to safeguard the privacy rights of Albertans, this bill needs some changes.

I'm not surprised to hear the members opposite suggest that it doesn't need changes. It certainly wouldn't be the first time they have felt the need to question the expertise or independence of independent officers of this Legislature. Certainly, we have seen them fire an independent officer of this Legislature for investigating them as outlined in the mandate.

We have certainly seen them attack the expertise of the Ethics Commissioner in suggesting that if she was allowed to consider privileged information, then that would be extremely problematic, which is, you know, funny coming from some of those members that don't have legal training, to stand up and say that a woman with legal training would be unable to consider that information. I'm not surprised to see them once again stand up and suggest that a woman with significant experience in this area shouldn't be the one making the decision, that her advice and her expertise are insufficient grounds on which to question this legislation, that instead members of this Chamber, members of the UCP caucus, despite their lack of expertise in the area, are better positioned to make those decisions.

I think that this is – I mean, it's incredibly problematic. I shouldn't be surprised, because it often seems that the members across the way are allergic to the concept of expertise, to the concept of evidence. They make statements all the time in this place about, quote, unquote, so-called experts, so-called in the sense that they are recognized by the public at large as experts in their area, but the members opposite feel that they should question it because the data and the expertise and the analysis and the logic of the situation counteracts their rhetoric and their ideology.

I think that that is extremely problematic, and in this case that ideology, that intention to move forward to discredit the expertise of people who work in this very area will harm the privacy rights of Albertans. It will harm their right to have control over the private health information about themselves, which I think is incredibly problematic and continues to be incredibly problematic.

We've made multiple attempts to attempt to clean up this legislation. This is only one of them, but what this would do is enable a custodian to consider the issue, to essentially consider what an Albertan who may not be able to speak for themselves in that moment would have wanted to happen with their own private information. I think that's a relevant consideration. I'm surprised to discover that anyone would think that that wasn't a relevant consideration. What more relevant consideration could there be,

when dealing with the private and personal health information of an individual Albertan, than what we think that person would want?

I am incredibly in favour of this amendment. I would urge all members to vote in favour of this. I'm concerned. I'm concerned that this legislation is moving through with the speed that it is moving through. I am concerned that it is occurring in the middle of a pandemic. I am concerned that the minister is not here to answer.

The Deputy Chair: Member.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: I think I have already interjected. [interjections] I have already interjected on this prior to the point of order being called.

I would just ask that the hon. member withdraw the comments and continue.

Ms Ganley: I withdraw the comments. Allow me to rephrase. We have not heard a justification for this. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Order.

4:20

Ms Ganley: I'm not really sure what the heckling is about.

Okay. To carry on, I think the concern here is that we haven't heard a justification for why we need to remove the protections around Albertans and around their privacy. The concern here is that we've made multiple attempts to improve this, multiple attempts in accordance with what the Information and Privacy Commissioner, an independent officer of this Legislature charged with having the expertise in this very area, has suggested we do, and the government has voted them all down with little to no explanation for why. So I am concerned. I think Albertans are concerned, and I think they are rightfully concerned by this legislation.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will simply say that I urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join on A5? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak briefly to what's before us and the amendments put forward by my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre and supported by this side. You know, I'm very disheartened and disappointed that the amendments are coming up against stone-walling from the other side.

In this case the health statutes amendment put forward by the Minister of Health expands the number of permitted uses, incredibly, that this health information of Albertans can be used for. Investigations – I'm taking from the Information and Privacy Commissioner's letter, that is substantive and eight pages and has an attachment to it, where she lays out all the concerns. The additional uses, permitted uses that are in these health statutes include "investigations, practice reviews, discipline proceedings and inspections of a health profession or discipline." It includes research, includes education, includes internal management, "including planning, resource allocation, policy development, quality improvement, monitoring, audit, evaluation, reporting and human resource management." None of that comes with the concomitant protections that are currently in legislation, that get changed with this legislation.

The Privacy Commissioner is saying that, you know, maybe you can do that, but you have to have similar kinds of protections for

the use of that information. We're not seeing that here. I do know that it was raised that there will be an incredible fine that could be levied on people who contravene the aspects of this statute, the health statutes, but, you know, the horse is already out of the barn at that point in time.

I want to just remind members on the other side that even in grad school and universities those graduates, if they want to use information, if they want to conduct studies, research, education, have to go through an ethics review. That's standard practice. None of that is going to happen with this new Bill 46, and that puts Albertans at significant risk in terms of the sharing of their information, health information, health records, which Albertans and people generally throughout the world hold very close and dear. Who wants others knowing your health information, your private information if there are not safeguards in place regarding the use and dissemination of that information?

I think the amendment brought forward is clear. It's unambiguous. It ensures that a person making health information accessible will have to consider the wishes of the relevant person, patient, in terms of making their health information accessible. What is wrong with that? Where does that come up against objections from the other side? Obviously, it does, and I don't think Albertans understand what the objection would be from the other side.

It goes on to say, our amendment, that if a person making health information accessible does not consider the wishes of a relevant person, patient, they will be guilty of an offence. Again, the need to put in some safeguards and belts and braces in this legislation can't be underestimated or underscored enough. We need to do that for the protection of Albertans. The amendment rectifies the problems that we identify here, and we certainly believe that it's in the best interests of Albertans. It needs to take place. My colleague from Edmonton-City Centre has done yeoman's duty with getting into this bill, trying to make a bad bill better. Believe me, we have put a series of amendments forward that have endeavoured to make this bad bill better for Albertans.

Just again last night I read the letter from the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I read it again today. Never have I read a letter that is so clear in terms of seeing the issues, laying out a course of action to fix the issues that are identified. You know, incredibly, it states that that person's views were not taken into account at all before this was brought forward. Indeed, in the bill briefing that the critic had with the minister's office, they indicated that there was consultation, and just at that exact point in time a press release was issued from the Information and Privacy Commissioner that disputed that statement. There was no consultation.

The letter is helpful in terms of understanding what the problems are and the desire to correct those problems before they are released. As others have pointed out before me, this government has a track record of correcting bad legislation after the fact, and this opposition is merely trying to identify and work with the government to make sure that that doesn't happen at the get-go and can be addressed up front.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will sit down and take my place.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen on A5.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, I think that perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre was saving the best for last, because this amendment speaks specifically to what the Privacy Commissioner was talking about in regard to compromising the integrity of private information with this amending bill.

You can see very specifically that the Privacy Commissioner wrote a considerable judgment on this bill, saying that it should be pulled, specifically this section. She talked about it on page 5 of her letter that she sent to the government. I hope you all read it.

In this letter she talked specifically about how with this change, this section, the individual might be unable to be protected by the Privacy Commissioner by making this change in this bill to the act. I can't imagine a situation where a government would want to do that. For someone to express explicitly that they did not want their health information to be shared – certainly, I can speculate, as I did before, talking about setting the stage, setting the table for more private health care, more private insurance, right? That's, of course, the golden – if someone is trying to profit off others' misery, then it's the insurance where you can really cash in. Having that information and being unable to block someone who's trying to access that information is absolutely unconscionable.

I know from years ago, when I was working as a public health advocate here in the province of Alberta, that we worked very closely and very carefully through the advent and the dissemination of electronic health records, where you can have the record of your patient or yourself, if you're the patient, being accessed by doctors and nurses in medical facilities across the province. We worked really hard to ensure the integrity of that information because, of course, any slip of it can not just compromise the privacy of someone but compromise the procedure and the health of that person, too. We worked very hard to make sure that the integrity of that electronic health record system was secure and worked very closely with the Health Quality Council to help make that happen.

4:30

Mr. Chair, I can't help noticing that this same UCP government, who is now trying to compromise the integrity and the privacy of health records here in the province of Alberta, has also sought to change the terms of reference of how the Health Quality Council presents information to the public here in the province of Alberta so that it has to present, I believe, through the minister.

Again, these are two examples, I believe, of the cavalier attitude that this government has towards public health care in the first place and, I would suggest, much more diabolically, of their intentions to compromise the integrity of our public health system, because when you are seeking to dismantle something that is so dear and so integral to the hearts and the health and the economy of our province, the first thing that you would do, I suppose, is have people question the integrity of that system. By compromising the way by which we can protect public health records – that's a great way to start to undermine the system, Mr. Chair. I would suggest that that is an insidious way to undermine the integrity of our public health system, too. Lots of people have asked questions. I do have some answers based on watching previous Conservative governments try to compromise the integrity of our public health system.

But you know what, Mr. Chair? People always fight back in this province. People presume that people are willing to say: oh, yeah; I could buy some health insurance, and everything will be fine. No. It doesn't work that way because we fought hard every step of the way to make sure that the attacks on our public health system were beaten back for a long time, since the inception of public health care. We have a system in place that is strong, that is public, that lives in the hearts and in the minds of 4 million Albertans here in the province. If you want to try to compromise that, you know that there are 4 million Albertans that will push back. It's a word of warning to this government . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Government Motion 55 the time for debate on this bill has now expired. I will now call the question on the amendment, followed by the questions on the bill.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:33 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Hoffman	Sabir
Eggen	Pancholi	Shepherd
Ganley		

Against the motion:

Allard	Luan	Rutherford
Copping	Madu	Savage
Dreeshen	McIver	Schow
Glubish	Neudorf	Schulz
Gotfried	Nicolaides	Toews
Hunter	Nixon, Jason	Turton
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Walker
LaGrange	Panda	Wilson

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 24
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[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 46 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:37 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For:

Allard	LaGrange	Panda
Copping	Luan	Rutherford
Dreeshen	Madu	Savage
Ellis	McIver	Schulz
Glubish	Neudorf	Toews
Gotfried	Nicolaides	Turton
Hunter	Nixon, Jason	Walker
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Wilson

4:40

Against:

Ceci	Hoffman	Sabir
Eggen	Pancholi	Shepherd
Ganley		

Totals:	For – 24	Against – 7
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[The remaining clauses of Bill 46 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

Bill 48**Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2)**

The Deputy Chair: I should make reference to the fact that Government Motion 59, passed earlier today, provides for one more hour of consideration on this. Therefore, are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise once again on this bill. As you have just made reference, we are at time allocation with respect to this bill, so I will attempt to focus my comments. This is one of three bills that has now been time-allocated at this stage. Certainly, we just saw Bill 46, which violates the privacy of Albertans, go through. We are now seeing this Bill 48, another omnibus bill under the guise of red tape reduction, and we will also see Bill 35, which is an advancement of the corporate handout, which is, of course, incredibly troubling because there's nothing that Albertans, I'm sure, are happier to see than a government who looks at a policy that is an epic failure, has created no jobs, and, in fact, lost 50,000 prior to the pandemic. Naturally, the government has chosen to triple down on that.

This bill is problematic. It's problematic like many other bills in this place. It's problematic because it's being jammed through this Legislature in an attempt to avoid having to talk about a bill that violates the rights of workers. That bill will likely come up later today, I imagine. It's also, I think, an attempt by the government to ensure that we get out of here as quickly as possible because I don't think they are enjoying being held to account on their pandemic response. This bill comes through. It's an enormous, enormous piece of legislation.

One of the most problematic things about it is that it takes from municipal councils the ability to determine timelines on development. Certainly, in my hometown of Calgary we have seen some very problematic moves. We've had a problem for years in that city where essentially developers profit off new development at the expense of the taxes of people who live in more established neighbourhoods, and I think that's problematic. We see rec centres and other facilities in those established neighbourhoods closing despite the increasing taxes placed on those residents. There's a fundamental unfairness to that, and, you know, we finally have a council who has started to address that fundamental unfairness, yet for some – well, I won't speculate on the reasons, but this government is moving forward to counteract the ability of councils to do that. This is a government who seems to delight in removing from other people the jurisdiction they have. They still feel the need to blame those other people for the limited decisions that they leave them with. This is just one example.

You know, city council: they love to blame city council for all sorts of things, despite the fact that they withdraw MSI support, they download costs of policing onto them, they force city councils to raise property taxes because they have no other mechanisms to backfill the UCP cuts, and then they're blamed. Again, we see this UCP government taking the power away from those people at the same time as they blame them, and we see them doing the exact same thing with school boards.

They cut funding to those school boards. They leave them in a position where they're taking on additional students with no additional resources. They fire over 20,000 employees. They, you know, get rid of many, many educational assistants, leaving students in a position that they won't get the supports when they need them, and that's a deficit that can never be made up again. Once those children lose that opportunity, it is gone, and they will forever be altered by that. Yet this government takes those actions,

they harm those students, and then they blame school boards, just like they blame municipalities for dealing with the realities that they are dealt. That, I mean, is a huge, huge concern.

At the same time we see this piece of omnibus legislation rushing through the House, we see multiple other pieces of omnibus legislation rushing through the House, bills that are problematic on an incredible number of fronts. We saw the government step in to legislate with respect to child care but refused to do anything about a fatality inquiry that resulted in multiple recommendations to the government to save the lives of children, to protect parents from having to bury their kids. Apparently, the government didn't have time to deal with that, but this – this – they will try to rush through.

I think Albertans can see, Albertans can see what the priorities are of this government: their failure to act on their commitments; their failure to act with respect to COVID-19; their failure to act to keep students in schools safe; their failure to act to increase protections for children in care in this province; their failure to act on so very many fronts; often a failure to even acknowledge, a failure to acknowledge that this recession is having a more intense impact on women than it is on men. They won't even acknowledge that.

That's extremely problematic, yet what they're interested in is omnibus legislation and putting omnibus legislation through this House before Albertans have the opportunity to know what it is that they're doing, because when Albertans do have the opportunity to weigh in, they weigh in in huge numbers, and they typically weigh in against what this government is doing. Certainly, we've seen Albertans in record numbers weigh in to attempt to protect our public health care system, a public health care system that is under siege from this UCP government. We've seen them weigh in in record numbers to protect the parks in this province, parks which are to be delisted by this government and then, as I once said, the land formerly known as parks can potentially be sold.

4:50

I think that there are a lot of things to be concerned about in this Legislature and in this bill. I mean, the number of acts affected by this bill are themselves difficult to list, but there are a number of concerns. There are changes all over.

The Land Titles Act is pretty fundamental to the rights of Albertans. Most people aren't aware of it, but it's a pretty important act. They're combining multiple boards into one board. I mean, there are huge, open questions about what that's going to look like, right? Administrative decision-making in this process in this province is incredibly important. You know, Albertans don't necessarily interact with all these systems every day, but these administrative decision-makers guide our lives in a number of ways and quite rightly so. But when changes are made to the boards and to the panels that make these decisions without experts, without Albertans, without people who understand these areas having time to weigh in and have an opinion on that, it is an incredible – incredible – concern.

You know, we see once again this government acting to put through a piece of legislation that – you know what? There are good things in this bill; there are bad things in this bill, but, certainly, Albertans haven't had the time to weigh in on this, and that is in part because their lives are challenging right now. People are busy. They're trying to work from home at the same time as home-schooling their children. You know, we have rising case numbers in this province. People are worried. They're worried for their lives and for the lives of their loved ones. They're under considerable financial strain.

I mean, there is another massive failure. There is somewhere that the government could have put their efforts instead of putting their

efforts into this, which is to say: the pandemic income support program. I mean, this only happened a few months ago and already people forget about it. But this government offered very limited pandemic supports to the people of this province, relying primarily on the federal government, but essentially the system crashed repeatedly. It kicked people out for no obvious reason. Ultimately, Albertans were accepted or declined on no rational basis whatsoever. It was entirely arbitrary. Very little creates stress in people quite like arbitrary and unreasonable rules. Thousands who qualified were denied, again, for no actual reason, but it certainly did help this government with its bottom line.

I mean, there are so many things that are of concern that are happening in this place, not just this bill, not just the bill we've previously discussed but the bill that's coming, a bill that triples down on a failed policy, a failed policy that attempted to create jobs and hasn't created one single job yet.

At the same time that this government talks a big game about job creation, they cut all of the diversification programs in this province, saying that these things were a luxury. They cut 11,000 front-line health care workers, and they didn't just cut them; they didn't just lay them off. They had the audacity to claim that those who clean up vomit and other fluids during a pandemic are not, in fact, front-line and to suggest that they are overpaid at \$17 an hour.

They laid off, as I mentioned previously, over 20,000 educational workers. That is a massive concern because at this time when children are increasingly being expected to learn online, it is at this moment that those children who struggle learning to read and with other matters need the most support, and it is at this time that the government has withdrawn that support. While parents are under strain trying to home-school at the same time that they are working, while students are under significant mental challenge from being sort of bumped out of their usual routine, we see this government withdrawing supports from them, withdrawing supports when they need them the most.

This bill, Mr. Chair, is a concern. The closure on this bill is a concern, and I think the way that things are moving in this place is a concern. I think this bill is very problematic, and I would urge members of this House to vote against it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen to debate Bill 48.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course, folks have been watching with bated breath for updates on the new measures that were foreshadowed earlier in the day. I have to say that, first of all, I want to recognize the relationship between this legislation and municipalities and the decisions that were just revealed to the province of Alberta. I know that we've had municipal leaders begging the government to step up and make some evidence-based decisions on behalf of the entire province as it came to masks. I guess, better late than never. Certainly, we are late, I believe the last province in the country to act on this.

I want to take a moment to recognize the municipal advocates who've been working for this in our large urban centres but also many rural elected officials who will certainly be impacted by this omnibus legislation and their ability to work on behalf of their constituents, as they have to date.

There is much more to be said about the steps that were just rolled out, but I'll take this time to focus the majority of my thoughts on the legislation and areas that I think are problematic.

I want to reinforce that this is absolutely by all definitions an omnibus piece of legislation. The government is choosing to amend several acts through one bill. Many of these acts that are going to

be amended have only come into force in the last few years, including one that I'll touch on that I don't believe I spoke to in prior stages, and that's around the New Home Buyer Protection Act, which was brought in in 2014. I'll tell you that under my experiences, and the experiences of many Albertans in this province, it's something that I wish I would have had in place in 2008 when I moved into a new condo. Absolutely, it had been signed off by all of the checks and balances, the fire inspector and so forth, but once we were in that building for a couple of years, we started to realize the significant deficits that existed.

For example, a very tangible one, there were sprinklers throughout the building, which was great because it was a wood frame and multifamily dwelling. The sprinklers had been installed before the stippling on the ceiling had been done, so the sprinklers were all covered in stipple; therefore, all needed to be replaced. The panel when you pulled the fire alarm on the third floor: it was the one floor that wouldn't actually speak to the panel and, therefore, call the fire department automatically. There were a number of small but very serious errors made in the construction of that building.

Over many years in doing our own building assessments and bringing in the fire inspector and doing our own follow-ups; for example, another big one – this is one that was very costly – was the way the decks were wrapped. Instead of being wrapped horizontally with the seams hidden away from the elements, they were wrapped vertically, essentially, perpendicular to the building rather than parallel to the building, meaning that water got in and damaged the integrity of those decks for a very significant cost and safety issues for the building.

Those are just a couple of the issues that existed back in 2008 that the government of the day, which, again, was a different Conservative government, acted on with the New Home Buyer Protection Act to bring in some measures to provide for greater accountability and awareness for homebuyers. Especially when you're buying a new home, you don't expect to have to replace, you know, a \$20,000-plus deck within the first few years you've lived there. You don't expect to have to pull out and redo a significant portion of the fire safety that was done in the building. You expect that those things were properly taken care of.

While I imagine that there were some errors on the part of the fire safety report, one of the safeguards that was put in place after that time was the new homebuyer legislation so that there would be this additional requirement for builders to have an assessment report for new condominium projects, so everyone who is buying – often I hear the adage: buyer beware. You can only beware of what is evident to you. Definitely, you can do an inspection in your internal unit, but knowing what the issues are on common property especially, I think, is something that was put in place for a good reason.

5:00

I know that the government says, "well, this is redundant; it's not necessary," but in 2014 the other pieces of legislation were also in existence, and it was considered necessary. I would have liked to have heard the government minister responsible for that piece, which I imagine is probably Service Alberta, maybe Municipal Affairs, speak to the challenges with that regard in this bill. I don't believe that we've heard those questions answered in this place, and here we have the government moving closure to fast-track its expedition of this bill.

Another piece that I want to speak in greater detail on is the Modernized Municipal Government Act and the Municipal Government Act both being amended through this legislation. This in itself could have been a stand-alone bill, was worthy of being a

stand-alone bill. When we've considered amendments to other orders of government, including the municipal government, we have taken our time as members of this House to review significant changes to their scope, their responsibilities, their duties. To put in these substantive changes that significantly curtail the role of municipal councils in this legislation and, I would argue, county and other rural municipality mandates as well, municipal districts being one of those and towns, to significantly change their role, their scope, their practice in an omnibus piece of legislation, hidden in section 9, deep into the bill already on page 30, and to do it in the middle of a pandemic, when municipalities have been asked to step up and take the courageous leadership positions that this Premier and cabinet have failed to take in trying to protect their communities, I think is very disrespectful of the relationship between the provincial government and local or municipal governments.

I will just mention that a couple of the challenges I feel most strongly about in this regard relate to the role of municipal decision-makers and their authorities when it comes to municipal development. I'm just going to pull up a couple of the comments here that I wanted to share. Specifically, the tighter timelines for development permits mean that municipalities won't be able to undergo the thorough peer-review process that's currently in place by the Urban Design Review Panel and in Calgary, in particular, by the Planning Commission. Both bodies have citizen representatives who are experts in the fields of planning, design, and development, and they absolutely won't be able to do their work under these new condensed timelines. The city of Calgary relies on the expertise from great communities to ensure that the city is growing in a way that's sustainable and focused on making sure that our communities are places where you want to live, work, and have some fun, especially when we're allowed to do so together.

The tight timelines, I believe, force council to become a *de facto* development authority rather than allowing council to engage with the appropriate authorities and stakeholders to make sure that they're making decisions around future growth and development in the best interests of their municipalities. This is one of the primary focuses of municipal councils given the changes that have been made over many, many years to the role of local decision-makers as councillors. That means that development permits are possibly going to get denied because of the fast-track process, kicking them to the minister, who isn't aware of the local experiences to the same degree as local councillors would be. I believe that this is a repeal of the ability of a city to negotiate timelines with industry and to exercise the authority that was democratically given to them.

You know, perhaps it shouldn't shock me, because we have heard some statements in this place that are incredibly disrespectful to local decision-makers, especially recently when it comes to their ability to assess information, set budgets, set priorities for the municipalities. There have been repeated, aggressive verbal attacks on specific and sometimes general councillors throughout our province. I think that the people who were elected to those roles are the ones who are accountable to their electorate.

If members of this order of government want to raise their concerns with local decision-makers, I say: fill your boots. But to do it in such an aggressive, overt, and disrespectful fashion in this place, where many times the Speaker and, I imagine, you, Mr. Chair, have raised grave concerns about people not being able to defend themselves or comment in response to some of the direct attacks that are issued on them – it probably shouldn't shock me that the government is bringing forward bills that also attack their authority and ability to make decisions on behalf of their electorate.

Those are two of the areas, and, you know, there are many, many others. There is, of course, the Centennial Medal Act, which I

believe makes the only power that still remains as the power to revoke a centennial medal that somebody has received, because they won't be giving additional ones. Okay. So be it. But to put in the power to revoke one seems really interesting to me.

The Animal Health Act: another piece that's being amended. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act is being amended: Fatality Inquiries Act, Historical Resources Act, land and property rights tribunal act, Land Titles Act, Maintenance Enforcement Act. I mentioned the two pieces of municipal legislation and the homebuyers, and then, of course, there's the Post-Secondary Learning Act, the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, and Wills and Succession Act.

These are massive changes to a number of bills, and this government has chosen to not only lump them all together into one big omnibus bill in the middle of a pandemic, when they feel like they have less public scrutiny and oversight, but they've also chosen during that public pandemic state of emergency, under these conditions, to bring forward closure to ram these through in a fashion that they so choose and to do so with the majority of the debate happening either in the midst of major announcements that are being made in the province of Alberta – of course, rightfully so, Albertans are focused on the announcements that are being made and how those are going to change their lives effective immediately or as of Saturday – and in the middle of the night, because I imagine we will probably be discussing some of these things into the wee hours tonight because the government was so eager to leave yesterday before 10 p.m. They only reconvened the House for a couple of hours last night and cancelled this morning completely.

We have to, of course, debate these issues in the middle of an address by the government and senior health officials and the midst of the middle of the night. It definitely speaks to the lack of transparency and respect when it comes to our municipal partners. I would say that they are not behaving in a partnerly fashion with this bill.

I also fear for other new homebuyers who were relying with that additional check and balance that will no longer be in place, particularly condo homebuyers. We've seen many issues with condos in the past, and I fear we're only going to see more that's under less oversight being rammed through by this change. At the same time, Mr. Chair, we're telling everyone that they must work from home unless they are in a profession like a teacher for a high school student; then they must come into the school building. Some of these changes seem to not be consistent with logic when it comes to this bill, its legislation, or some of the announcements that are being made by this government at this very time.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll cede the remainder of my time to my colleagues because I'm sure that many have a lot of things to say, and there is, of course, a time constraint on this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 48? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 48, and I think I want to thank my colleagues before me today here, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, for providing an excellent summary of the variety of different pieces of legislation that have been crammed into this, yet another omnibus piece of legislation, and the concerns that those pieces of legislation raise. I won't go into too much detail with respect to the concerns they've raised around the Municipal Government Act. I thank the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for talking about condos.

5:10

I'd like to focus my comments today a little bit on the changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Now, I've already had an opportunity, Mr. Chair, to rise in this House and speak about my concern that despite the commitment made by this government, by the Minister of Children's Services to follow through on the action plan that was developed as a result of the all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, which laid out a clear action plan for significant steps to be taken by the government to improve our child intervention system, specifically with a focus around reducing the number of indigenous children in care. That action plan had a clear target date within it as part of its short-term actions, and that was to amend the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act by 2020, and the end of the year, as we all know, is only a couple of weeks away now. It was meant to – and there was a commitment, and there has been confirmation from the Minister of Children's Services that she is committed to doing the work under the action plan, yet the amendments that were supposed to be made in that action plan to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act are not before the Assembly today.

I was frustrated, Mr. Chair, when I saw Bill 48. When I saw amendments were being made to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, I thought: okay; finally, maybe, they're carrying through on that commitment. It was not a partisan issue. It was something that all parties in this House at that time and the current parties right now agreed to, which was to make substantive changes to that act to improve the outcomes for indigenous children in care and to reduce the number of indigenous children in care. Yet when I reviewed Bill 48 and I opened it up, I was shocked to see that there was nothing in this bill that is meant to address the commitment that the government of Alberta, under two governing parties now, has made to indigenous communities and indigenous children in care in this province.

I still would like to hear a clear answer from the Minister of Children's Services and from this government as to why they are failing on that commitment. Under the watch of this government the percentage of indigenous children in care has gone up. Now, I realize it's been a challenging year for all, but our most vulnerable children are the ones that we should be focusing on the most, yet they are the ones that we have an increased number of.

If there was ever a priority for this government – well, we see what the priorities are from this government – it should be making sure that we're taking all the steps we can and that we have committed as a government to actually make the legislative changes around the role of the band designate and do that work as we're supposed to, as this government committed to do, yet they are not doing it.

Now, the Minister of Children's Services has risen in this House and given all kinds of explanations and tried to diminish the work of that action plan by saying, "Oh, it's all on hold now," or "It's complicated now because of Bill C-92," the federal legislation which allows for indigenous groups to have autonomy over the child welfare system in their communities. It is a significant piece of legislation and it is complex, but that is not a reason for this government to abdicate their responsibility to children in care. They still have a commitment. There's a lot up in the air on that bill, so to fail to address those issues when that act is open before the Assembly, I think, is an abdication of responsibility. I have to say that again, Mr. Chair, because I'm deeply disappointed by that.

I also want to talk a little bit about the changes that have been made in this bill around adoption. Now, after that little fiery piece I will say that there are changes that have been made here within Bill 48 around postadoption processes and the principles to be

considered when placing a child in an adoptive home that are good, that I am supportive of, that I think are important work. However, I don't quite see – and I had the opportunity to review the comments from the Minister of Children's Services with respect to Bill 48 – how this is necessarily carrying through with the significant challenges that were raised by the motion brought forward by the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain about the significant challenges Albertans face, prospective parents face going through the adoption process.

I've reviewed the changes in Bill 48 in detail. There are a couple of minor changes about the actual adoption process. I have heard from my constituents, I have heard from friends who have been involved in the adoption process, who talk about, of course, the length of time of that process, how heart-wrenching it can be, how exhausting it can be to try to actually successfully adopt a child.

We all in this House stood in favour and supported that motion last session on improving the processes around adoption. I don't see those changes in Bill 48. Now, I am cognizant of the fact that the Minister of Children's Services has indicated that there will be further changes coming in the regulations. On that we will just have to trust the Minister of Children's Services, but given how she's managed the changes to child care, I'm not confident in what will happen in those regulations, but I do hope that we will see regulations making substantive changes to the processes because I can tell you that Bill 48 does not seem to do that.

Now, it does proclaim a private member's bill from the previous Legislature, that was brought forward by the now Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, around posting prospective parents' profiles online. I think that's a good change. I believe I was not part of the Legislature when that private member's bill was up for debate, but I understand that all parties in the House voted in favour of that, and proclaiming that is certainly a good step. It certainly doesn't have to be part of an omnibus piece of legislation like this. It could have been done through miscellaneous statutes. Really, it's a proclamation. I don't even really know that it had to be done specifically through a bill. That's great. That's a good thing to do. I won't dispute that. I certainly heard that specific comment from constituents saying that they would like the option to do that.

In terms of actually addressing the outcomes, of improving the outcomes and the speed of the process for adoption, I do not see those changes in this bill.

I also want to address one other specific issue around adoption, and that was that earlier this year one of the only four adoption agencies in Alberta, which was Adoption by Choice, closed quite suddenly and quite traumatically. They gave very little notice to the families who had to that point invested thousands of dollars in that agency, had invested years of their time in hopes of becoming prospective parents, and it was shut down quite suddenly.

I was contacted by many of those prospective parents and had some very heart-wrenching conversations with a lot of them. You know, they told me that with the sudden closure of this adoption agency, losing all of the money they'd invested, all of the time they'd invested, they would have to go to the back of the line with any new adoption agency, and they were heartbroken. They'd already gone through, for most of them, a very gut-wrenching process of realizing, for many of them, that they would not become biological parents themselves. They'd gone through infertility, they'd gone through several measures, so they had now engaged in the process of adoption. They had lost so much money and time that many of them said that this was the end of their adoption journey. It was absolutely heartbreaking.

But then what was most troubling, Mr. Chair, is that when that came out, looking back, it became clear, very evident, that there

were actually significant problems with this adoption agency that very suddenly closed and ended the adoption journey for many of these families. There were clear problems with the executive director and chair of the board of this agency, who was under criminal investigation, who was under investigation through the Alberta College of Social Workers for fraud. This was all, you know, very upsetting, but most importantly this information had been brought to the attention of the Ministry of Children's Services. They were aware of this, and to that end the Ministry of Children's Services had issued two conditional licences in a row to that adoption agency. Yet nobody from the ministry required either the agency themselves to let these parents know that there were problems with the way this agency was operating, nor did they advise them themselves.

Now, the minister has indicated in her comments on this bill that she's made changes now, that she'll be making changes which will require agencies to immediately notify clients if their licence has become conditional. While that might be a good change, it's interesting that the ministry itself did not avail itself of the authority that it actually has under the current provisions of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, under section 89(7) of the current act, not changed by this legislation. A director from Children's Services is supposed to notify the clients of a licensed adoption agency of a decision to add conditions to a licence, yet the Ministry of Children's Services never did that.

Some of those parents who lost their money, who lost thousands of dollars and lost their time, would not have gone to that adoption agency had they been notified. Well after these conditional licences were given to this adoption agency, Adoption by Choice, by the Ministry of Children's Services, many of these parents and these clients still invested thousands of dollars. If they'd known that there were conditions and what those conditions are, had the ministry done what they were supposed to do under the current legislation, maybe some of those families would have been saved some heartache and some money, but they didn't do that.

I'm happy to hear that the Ministry of Children's Services is now going to make some changes to require the agency to notify their clients when there are problems with their licence. But I want to point out for the record, Mr. Chair, that that authority already rests with the Ministry of Children's Services, to notify clients of an agency where conditions have been placed on that licence, and in this situation, to the detriment of 90 Alberta families who have lost money and lost time and have invested a great deal of emotional energy into the process of adoption, they failed those families. I'm happy to hear that the minister is taking action to improve that, but she should also take accountability for the failure on the part of her ministry to actually help these families when she should have.

5:20

With that being said, Mr. Chair, I have to express that while there are pieces of Bill 48 with respect to adoption that I think are good in terms of the information to connect families post adoption, it fails on many other fronts in terms of following the commitments under the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. Certainly, I believe that in this bill it does not improve, as is suggested by the minister, the process of adoption the way that the minister is lauding that it does. It simply does not do that. I hope the regulations will make the changes on behalf of those families who are looking to adopt a child. I sincerely hope that the process is improved, and I'll be watching that with great interest.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate on Bill 48? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 48 and to follow my colleagues from Edmonton-Whitemud, Edmonton-City Centre, and Calgary-Mountain View as they focused on different aspects of Bill 48. The part of the bill that I'll focus on is with regard to the changes to the MGA.

Mr. Chair, what I did to try and understand completely the changes to the MGA and the amendments that are being brought forward was to talk to different planners, whether they be retired or currently working, and one that I talked to said that they agree with me that these amendments are substantive and significant and need to be dealt with separately after a lengthy consultation process with all municipalities and, in particular, with the public as well. The public is involved, as we know, with the outcomes of decisions made at the municipal level across the province, and the buildings in the communities and the decisions that get made have to be lived with by Albertans for a very long time. So that question is a good one.

I recognize, hearing from the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, that in the past there was consultation – I believe it was in early 2020 – and that the development industry, planners or the association for planners, the RMA, the AUMA, and the two large cities were involved. But that's really not comprehensive in terms of who is impacted by this. There was no public consultation on this, as I could understand. You know, the planner I talked to said: there should be no rush as municipal staff are operating generally from their homes, and consultation amongst staff and staff to council members is not ideal at this moment. That's really true. I know that many of the councils across the province are dealing with electronic council meetings, Zoom and other things, and the opportunity to dig into these decisions is waylaid in terms of their opportunities.

I'll get to the RMA's recent letter on this in a second, but I just wanted to point out that, you know, we're talking about the MGA. This planner talks about: again, the concept of a land-use bylaw, which has been in the Planning Act since 1978, is being changed without public consultation. The public, I guess, are the representatives, as I understand the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, and those groups that I mentioned earlier. The new system as proposed will be a fundamental shift, this person goes on to say, in the regulation of land and development in this province.

I want to focus on a couple of specific items in this bill, changes to the time to make a decision. The person I consulted with was, you know, a 25-year planner with the city of Calgary. They said that section 640.1 of the MGA sets the time frame to make a decision with the municipality through their land-use bylaw. The new changes will dictate the time frame in the MGA. The previous time frames will be in effect for six months, so there's a six-month grandfather period, but after that time the municipality must follow a new 60-day decision date. That may be easy for municipalities that have a lower volume of subdivision and development applications, but the complexity of the subdivision and development applications has a direct correlation with the time it takes to process the application.

It just makes sense, Mr. Chair, that there are circulation referees and, you know, dozens of people to weigh in on difficult and complex applications or developments. All those circulation referees need time to go through that, and during COVID these circulation timelines have been protracted as staff are working from home, and it's difficult to get them around tables to do detailed team reviews on important, complicated developments coming forward.

There's no one-time or one-size-fits-all approach to subdivision development applications. As you can appreciate, a complex, multistorey office building in an urban setting takes a lot longer to review and discuss with applicants than an industrial building perhaps does or a new subdivision of 600 residential parcels with some parks and a shopping centre, a local school. It takes longer to evaluate those kinds of things than perhaps a farmstead separation, which, presumably, these kinds of changes would fit within.

The municipalities, as I understand it, with this new amendment can set their own time frames, but they have to go back to the minister and say: you know, these are the time frames we've established in agreement with developers or applicants. The minister can look at those time frames, those reportings, and perhaps come down on municipalities and say: "No. I want those to be a lot shorter. I want them to be more compact timewise." But, really, if it's a development that is complex and needs that opportunity to have many circulation referees involved going back and forth with the applicant, what's the rush?

I mean, these are buildings and developments that will be around for generations and generations. Indeed, those people are designing heritage buildings for the future and approving heritage buildings for the future. What are the comments from all municipalities with regard to that? I know that the AUMA and the RMA weighed in, and perhaps now is the time to consider what the RMA's analysis of this is, just recently, on the 4th of December, put on their website for all to see. It says:

RMA is concerned that Bill 48 proposes reductions in municipal autonomy . . .

Let's just think about municipal autonomy. This government has been pretty fast and loose with rolling over municipalities in this province, and this is another example of that, members of the Legislature.

The RMA is concerned that Bill 48 proposes reductions in municipal autonomy based on limited evidence from the development industry that the changes will have a meaningful impact in reducing red tape or supporting economic growth and job creation.

That's not a ringing endorsement of actions being put forward by the government, I can tell you. In my view, it's looking at the decisions being made by the government and saying, "Really, you've only looked at one side of the ledger," and that is the ledger of the development industry, who members on the other side like to call job creators. Those job creators are really, you know, setting the tune for this government, to the downfall of municipal autonomy.

It goes on to say:

In general, RMA supports . . . red tape reduction initiatives if they are based on evidence-supported concerns with current legislation and processes.

That goes on to kind of come out in a damning way and say:

However, the concept of "red tape reduction" cannot be used as a catch-all to justify reducing municipal authority over land use planning and other areas without understanding the potential benefits and consequences of such a reduction.

5:30

Really, the RMA is speaking up for all municipalities and saying that, you know, this looks like an overreach, with the government, the minister using red tape reduction as the rationale. RMA is refuting that, saying it

cannot be used as a catch-all to justify reducing municipal authority,

which it is doing,

over land use planning and other areas without understanding the potential benefits and consequences of such a reduction.

There is a penultimate line here as well.

RMA is particularly concerned with changes to the scope of the SDABs and the MGB in hearing appeals of development decisions on provincially-regulated properties.

And it goes on:

RMA will continue to advocate for all changes to be evidence-based and linked to economic growth and job creation.

I think it's pretty clear that the views of the writers and RMA – it's under their title – are questioning some of the rationale and the loss of municipal autonomy.

As I said, this is not the first time that we're dealing with the loss of municipal autonomy in this Legislature. The Local Authorities Election Act, where this government steamrolled over the wishes of municipalities with regard to the holding of referendums and Senate elections, when there were expressed views put forward by the associations, RMA, AUMA, the mayors of different cities and towns around this province that said: we don't want that in our local elections; keep your referendums, keep your Senate elections, and do it yourself during your own time frame, which is in 2023 – it can't come fast enough – or some other time when you want to hold in the province of Alberta those referendums. Do it then. But this government didn't think about any of that stuff. It didn't agree with any of that. It said: we'll do what we want to do, and we're going to save money and time in doing it.

Well, I've got news for you. Those kinds of things still cost money, but I understand that you're going to download those costs onto municipalities across the province. You're not talking about giving more money to the Chief Electoral Officer, and that person came forward and requested I think it was \$1.6 million to partner with municipalities around the province, but it wasn't something that members of the Democratic Accountability Committee, the majority membership on the government side, agreed to. The Chief Electoral Officer said, "I need \$1.6 million to hold those kinds of referenda and Senate elections," but there was nothing forthcoming from the government.

They're downloading costs onto municipalities. They're not listening to the autonomous views of municipalities. They believe that they're creations of the province and that they should be treated as children of the province, when, really, yeah, they are creations of the province, but they should be treated as, you know, people who know what they're doing, long-term councillors and administrators and people in bureaucracies around this province who have spent their whole lives working for the local citizenry at the local government level.

Mr. Chair, there are lots of reasons to not support parts of this bill that have come forward and to oppose them. My colleagues and I will oppose Bill 48 because it's an omnibus bill that should have come forward with the support of individual ministers around the various aspects of the acts that are being changed. Still, it's an omnibus that purports to be red tape reduction, but, you know, the RMA, by their own admission, says that there's nothing to do – it's not evidence-based in terms of the changes that are being brought forward.

Basically, what I get from this is, you know, that the government listened to the developers and didn't take the views of all municipalities, nor the public, into mind before they made the changes. The local councils around the province, local municipalities around the province have to live with those changes, but it won't create a better situation at the local level in terms of development and applications for land use, for development permits, and, as this planner says: they're involved in developments for the building of the future heritage buildings of our time in the future.

With that said, Mr. Chair, I'm going to take my seat, and I, of course, oppose this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 48? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 48, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2). I'm going to follow on some of the comments from my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. You know, as a representative for an urban constituency, indeed in the heart of the city, there is a lot of discussion and a lot of interest around development and around city building. I have a lot of folks that live in my constituency that work for the city of Edmonton and work in the planning department that are very passionate about urbanization, and I have a lot of people who are very interested in the ongoing development.

I can speak to the Oliver Community League here in my constituency, I would say probably one that in the past has been and continues to be one of the most active community leagues in our city and has participated, I think, probably more than any other community league in this city in discussions with city council and at meetings about development and not just in the heart of the city in our neighbourhood here but indeed with expansion of the city in other areas.

The reason for that, Mr. Chair, is because my constituency here, and particularly the neighbourhood of Oliver, is one of the densest in the city of Edmonton, one of the most heavily developed, and indeed carries a significant amount of the weight in terms of residential and property taxes. Those taxes go to fund city services for new neighbourhoods, which are built on the outskirts of the city.

Now, I don't bring that up by way of complaint. I know that has been a common refrain in this place, when we complain about how much Alberta sends to Ottawa and gets back in return. The Member for Highwood at one point was complaining about the Calgary city council's police budget and "How dare they cut the city budget?" because that affects policing in his area, so Calgary should be subsidizing the policing for other parts of the province. That's not what I'm getting at here.

But it is a consideration, Mr. Chair, because when we have unchecked development on the fringes of our city, it does drive up costs for the more developed and older neighbourhoods in the city because often we are not seeing enough property tax revenue from those new neighbourhoods to cover the costs of extending services: transit, sewer, policing, fire department, all those additional infrastructure, recreation facilities. Those are all additional costs that come with further development on the edges of a city.

Indeed, there is a growing recognition that we need to be more conscious of this, that we went through an era in some municipalities in particular – certainly, in Calgary this has been a real issue – of unchecked sprawl, where development was simply allowed to go on without much thought or much consideration and has created some difficult circumstances.

Indeed, I know that in the heart of Calgary the office towers were carrying a significant amount of the property tax for the city of Calgary compared to the residential developments that had expanded outside the edges of the city, and that has become a major issue for Calgary city council now, with the prolonged economic downturn due to the drop in the price of oil and now, of course, the world-wide pandemic.

5:40

It is incredibly important that cities, that municipalities, be empowered, I think, Mr. Chair, to set their own timelines, to make their own decisions regarding further development, but what we have here in Bill 48 is that this government, as it has so often done

with municipalities, is dictating to them what it feels they should do based on who it considers, perhaps, to be its friends.

My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo noted the concerns that were raised by the RMA regarding these changes. Now, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction stated that overall this was needed to speed up the timelines for subdivisions and development permits and to provide needed certainty for these job creators. I find it fascinating, Mr. Chair, to look at whom this government is concerned with providing certainty to and whom they are not.

They are fast working to undermine certainty for all kinds of organizations. They're quite happy to undermine all certainty for physicians in the province of Alberta and put them utterly at the whim of the Minister of Health. They are utterly willing to take away certainty for Albertans in terms of the protection of their health information but in this particular case seem to feel that it is absolutely essential that property developers have certainty at the expense of the local municipalities.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Government Motion 59 the time for debate on this bill has now expired. I will now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 48 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:42 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For:

Allard	Luan	Panda
Copping	Madu	Rutherford
Dreeshen	Nally	Savage
Ellis	Neudorf	Schulz
Glubish	Nicolaides	Turton
Hunter	Nixon, Jason	Walker
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Wilson
LaGrange		

Against:

Ceci	Ganley	Sabir
Eggen	Hoffman	Shepherd

Totals:	For – 22	Against – 6
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[The remaining clauses of Bill 48 agreed to]

[The voice vote indicated that the title and preamble were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:47 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For:

Allard	Luan	Rutherford
Copping	Madu	Savage
Dreeshen	Nally	Schulz
Ellis	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Glubish	Nicolaides	Turton
Hunter	Nixon, Jason	Walker
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Wilson
LaGrange	Panda	

5:50

Against:

Ceci	Ganley	Sabir
Eggen	Hoffman	Shepherd
Totals:	For – 23	Against – 6

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 48 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For:

Allard	Luan	Rutherford
Copping	Madu	Savage
Dreeshen	Nally	Schulz
Ellis	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Glubish	Nicolaides	Turton
Hunter	Nixon, Jason	Walker
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Wilson
LaGrange	Panda	

Against:

Ceci	Ganley	Sabir
Eggen	Hoffman	Shepherd
Totals:	For – 23	Against – 6

[Request to report Bill 48 carried]

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it has been a productive evening. I move that the committee rise and report bills 46 and 48.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion that the committee rise and report carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:56 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Luan	Rutherford
Copping	Madu	Savage
Dreeshen	Nally	Schulz
Ellis	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Glubish	Nicolaides	Turton
Hunter	Nixon, Jason	Walker
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Wilson
LaGrange	Panda	

6:00

Against the motion:

Ceci	Ganley	Sabir
Eggen	Hoffman	Shepherd
Totals:	For – 23	Against – 6

[Motion that the committee rise and report carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 46 and 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: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried. Seeing the time, we are now adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:01 p.m.]

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