



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 10, 2021

Day 82

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and 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 or desire to please or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would like to inform you that there has been a slight modification to Oral Question Period and the member statement rotation as a result of a change to caucus composition in the Assembly. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who now sits as an independent, is entitled to one question per week, starting with question 8 on day 4 of the Oral Question Period rotation, which is today, and the member is allocated one member statement every three weeks, starting on day 87 of the projected sitting calendar.

Members' Statements

Alberta Natural and Human Resources

Mr. Jones: As an Albertan are you optimistic? Undeniably, the last 12 months have been difficult, but we have been through challenging times before. Whether it be floods, fires, commodity crashes, economic downturns, and now a pandemic, Albertans persevere. That's because Albertans are a rare breed. They are hard-working, resilient, innovative, and entrepreneurial. We call one of the most beautiful places in the world, a place abundant in natural resources, our home.

The international business community is taking notice. They've noticed that Calgary and Edmonton are the most livable and affordable major international cities in Canada. They've noticed that we have the youngest, fastest growing, and most educated workforce, a workforce, by the way, that boasts the highest labour productivity in Canada. They've noticed our high quality of life and our world-class health care and education.

They've noticed that Alberta is a great place to do business. We have high-quality and affordable office space, the lowest corporate taxes in Canada, low personal income tax, no retail sales tax, low fuel taxes, a government obsessed with reducing regulatory burden, and a government committed to moving at the speed of business. They've noticed our extensive telecommunications networks, transportation links, and infrastructure. This offers companies direct access to the United States and easy access to the Pacific Rim and Europe, making Alberta a hub for companies looking to do business world-wide. It's no wonder that global leaders like Infosys are choosing Alberta for their expansion plans.

There's more good news. BMO is now predicting that Alberta will lead all Canadian provinces in economic growth in 2021. WTI has roughly doubled since last summer, western Canadian select recently hit a 52-week high, our agriculture and forestry industries

are thriving, vaccines are being rolled out, economies are opening up, so I ask you again: as an Albertan are you optimistic? We are, and you should be, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall

Budget 2021 and Calgary

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even before the pandemic Calgary was hurting under the UCP government. Investment dropped, the economy stalled, and 50,000 jobs were lost. Companies like EnCana packed up and left. Meanwhile, Husky took the corporate tax handout and laid off hundreds of Albertans, only to disappear altogether in a merger. Tech companies left the province or crossed Calgary off their list of destinations after the Finance minister declared diversification a luxury.

The office vacancy has skyrocketed in downtown Calgary, and it's expected to surpass 30 per cent in the next couple of years. When the Finance minister spoke to Calgary Chamber of commerce following the tabling of his budget, he said that filling the empty office towers in downtown Calgary is not his problem. This attitude of neglect was not much of a surprise given that the UCP's budget has nothing in it to support Calgary. There is no jobs plan in the budget, just vague promises and buzzwords and a lot of sections that are still under construction. Unfortunately, it looks like that's the only construction that will take place this year.

This budget will make drastic cuts to municipal funding for infrastructure that would create construction jobs and stimulate our economy. When it comes to the green line, the UCP delays will mean not a single shovel will be in the ground this year. That's 20,000 jobs that won't be created this year because the UCP would rather play political games and appease their big donors rather than getting Calgary back to work.

We need a government that's focused on creating jobs, supporting those who don't have jobs, and building a more diversified economy that includes everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, vaccine distribution is important for the lives and livelihoods of Albertans. Alberta government's vaccine rollout plan has been very successful so far. As of March 8 there have been 300,000 doses of the vaccine administered. Over 90,000 Albertans have received both doses and are fully immunized. The early phase of the vaccine distribution targeted health care workers that work in intensive care units, respiratory therapists, and staff in long-term care facilities. Phase 1 targeted other health care workers, long-term care residents, and seniors who are aged 75 and older.

Now we are starting to move to phase 2. Alberta is a great example for provinces in the vaccine distribution plan. We are already vaccinating Albertans who are 75 and over, and starting today, Albertans aged 50 to 74 will be able to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine. This is compared to British Columbia and Ontario, who are still vaccinating only people 80 years and older. Alberta's access to where you can get the vaccine is also expanding. On February 24 Albertans aged 75 and older were able to book their vaccination appointments at more than a hundred participating community pharmacies. The list of pharmacies will continue to grow as we continue to get more vaccines.

The great news of the vaccine rollout is that we already have hundreds of thousands of Albertans vaccinated, and thousands more have already signed up. I know many of us heard from the

opposition that our vaccine rollout had a few issues signing up, but I would like to point out that every large jurisdiction in Canada has faced challenges and hiccups. I know Alberta Health Services has been working very hard to get the vaccine into the arms of Albertans, and I would like to take a moment to thank them and congratulate them on their success so far.

With the continued procurement of the vaccine from the federal government and our continued success of the vaccine rollout, we will get the vaccine into the arms of Albertans who want one this year. I am proud of the efforts made for the vaccination distribution so far and can't wait to see our progress in the next few months.

Income Support Program Funding

Ms Renaud: This government says that removing \$53 million from income support isn't a cut and they're funding it sufficiently so that no one falls through the cracks, but that's not what I've heard at my office and in the results of a recent survey I conducted with income support recipients. Hundreds of vulnerable Albertans from across the province have reached out to me in distress because supplemental benefits are being systematically taken away.

This government says that core benefits haven't changed. While that's true, it is nothing to boast about. Core benefits for a single adult in private housing are \$866 a month, or just over \$10,000 a year. Some of the Premier's own staffers make more than that each month. Many have been relying on supplemental benefits to cover the shortfalls on diet, housing, and medical transportation, but eligibility for these benefits has changed, and the need to provide updated medical information every three months is a costly and prohibitive endeavour for many with limited resources and serious health concerns, particularly during a pandemic.

A respondent to my survey said, and I quote: "We've received cuts as follows: \$20 special diet; \$190 transportation allowance; \$307 additional shelter allowance. We are verging on homelessness." Another said: "I lost my medical transportation funding in January and my additional shelter funding in February. I was told I don't meet the criteria anymore. The workers said it was a short-term benefit and should only have been given to me for three months, so now my income support is reduced, \$791 a month exactly, and my rent is a thousand."

When will the UCP admit that the cuts to this program are translating into undue hardship and duress for recipients who are relying on these benefits to get them through what can be sometimes the toughest point in their lives? It says a lot about a government that prioritizes funding for a war room while Albertans go hungry and are pushed into homelessness.

Enough is enough. Reverse the cuts to income support.

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

1:40 Federal Private Member's Bill C-206

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple weeks ago the House of Commons passed second reading of Bill C-206, An Act to Amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act. The bill's sponsor, Philip Lawrence, MP for Northumberland-Peterborough South, brought the private member's bill in order to exempt natural gas and propane used by agriculture producers for farm use. Currently, marked farm fuels, diesel and gasoline, are exempt from the federal carbon tax. This bill would expand this exemption to natural gas and propane for agricultural purposes.

There's been much discussion and news regarding the carbon tax cost to farmers who use grain dryers and what that cost means to the average farm. According to the Western Canadian Wheat

Growers Association some farmers have paid over \$10,000 in carbon tax on their grain drying bill alone. That's at \$30 a tonne. It's easy math to see what happens at \$170 a tonne: more pressure on small farms, thinner margins, and more consolidation. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that this legislation could save farmers and ranchers \$235 million in carbon taxes over a five-year period.

Bill C-206 has passed second reading and is now in committee. The Bloc Québécois, the federal NDP, and the Green Party all voted for it, yet only one Liberal MP, a member of the agriculture committee, supported it. This bill, this proposed exemption, is about keeping our agriculture producers competitive. Alberta's ag producers are global price takers. To be competitive and sustainable on the world stage, our ag sector needs to not face punitive taxes for which there are no alternatives. Many world leaders have pointed to Alberta's natural gas reserves as a global answer to help the world shift to cleaner fuels. We cannot price out our own people and industries from using our own clean energy.

Thank you to MP Philip Lawrence for bringing forward this bill and standing up for Canadian ag producers. I ask all Albertans to join me in supporting Bill C-206.

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

Support for Agriculture

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans who work in agriculture and forestry are not just producers; they are stewards of the land. They care about the quality of our water, the health of our soil, and the management of our forests, so they work together to develop innovative, practical, long-term solutions that increase productivity and sustainability. The quality of these resources and the studies that prove their quality are international marketing tools that attract investment and create jobs. Generations of Albertans have built one of the most productive agricultural economies in the world, and they deserve our support.

That's why, when we were in government, we invested \$10 million into the Agrivalue Processing Business Incubator in Leduc, a system that helps our producers diversify their portfolios and expand into emerging markets. Economic diversification and expanding trading are critical to the long-term prosperity of Alberta, and cutting investment in programs like this does a disservice to Alberta's agricultural producers by reducing the opportunity. It does a disservice to Albertans everywhere by failing to support one of Alberta's largest economic drivers.

The minister and I agree that the federal government's investment in irrigation makes sense. It's an important and valuable contribution to agriculture and the economy in southern Alberta. Now it's time for the provincial government to offer the same level of support to the north, where drainage issues prevented crop production in more than 200,000 acres of farmland last year. Again, the federal government has stepped up with AgriStability. Now we need the provincial government to invest in our future. That funding is needed now, and it could be accessed if the provincial government would just adopt it.

The province is in an economically challenging time, and economic diversification is a necessity. Agriculture must be part of it, and Alberta needs their government to lead. However, sadly, the UCP is not. I will continue to push every day on behalf of Alberta's agricultural sector to ensure that the UCP stops taking our agricultural sector for granted so that they continue to be the driving force in our economic recovery.

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

Prairie Sky Equine Assisted Therapy Program

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak about the Prairie Sky Equine Assisted Therapy program for those diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder. Prairie Sky Equine Assisted Therapy consists of a community of riders, volunteers, and, of course, their incredible horses. Equine-assisted therapy is a recognized and effective form of therapy that promotes motor and cognitive function, fosters emotional intelligence, and increases physical strength. It has been proven that equine therapy can help those facing a range of physical, emotional, and social challenges. Since 2010 they've helped to change the lives of over 400 people. This organization is committed to creating a safe and accepting community. Every participant is encouraged to be themselves while finding their place in the herd.

Prairie Sky provides services to special-needs adults, children, and at-risk youth. Most recently they began offering this program to those suffering with PTSD, including first responders and military personnel. Science tells us that when an individual has experienced trauma, they tend to live in the fight-or-flight part of their brain, making it difficult to process complex thoughts and emotions. Completing seemingly complex or intimidating tasks with horses builds confidence and allows participants to be present. This helps to take the mind away from stress and trauma.

Prairie Sky Equine PTSD sessions include activities that promote thoughtfulness and self-awareness while working with the horses. The Prairie Sky PTSD program is delivered by a licensed psychologist, instructor, and facilitator, and encompasses six lessons over a three-week period. These front-line heroes have helped to make this world a better place with their courage, sacrifice, and dedication to our country. I'm very grateful for all of the work that Prairie Sky does to give back to our selfless individuals, our first responders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Registry Service Privatization

Mr. Carson: Registry services are accessed by thousands of Albertans every year. They provide necessary administrative services to Albertans such as purchasing and updating licences and land titles, and at the same time they generated over \$120 million in revenue just last year. In a time when the UCP are running record deficits, I have to ask: why in the world would they want to privatize such a vital revenue-generating service? But when I found out the Premier's former chief of staff and campaign director Nick Koolsbergen lobbied the UCP on privatizing registries, the same person, of course, who lobbied the UCP to get rid of the insurance cap as well as lobbying to privatize health care services, it became very clear.

It's clear the UCP will do anything they can to try and hide the multibillion-dollar hole they left in the budget by gambling on a Donald Trump victory while making their friends rich in the process. As I read through the UCP's budget, I was hoping to see a vision to navigate through unprecedented and challenging economic times. I was hoping for investment in industries that fostered innovation and encouraged young people to stay in and move to the province. When Alberta needed a bold, visionary budget, the best the UCP could come up with was considering the sale of profitable registries while adding millions of dollars in new user fees, and with the prospect of privatizing registries, there will no doubt be further increases to user fees in the near future if this plan goes forward.

I thought the UCP had learned from their attempt to sell our provincial parks that Albertans know a bad deal when they see one,

Mr. Speaker. Citizens spoke loud and clear that they would not stand by and watch the UCP's attempt at a fire sale on Alberta's parks and forced the government to take a step back. The plan for registries is not a done deal. I sincerely hope that Albertans push back, and I hope that the UCP listens. In fact, I encourage Albertans to speak out. These offices provide important services while also generating revenue, and they should absolutely not be sold off.

Rural Alberta

Mr. Loewen: In the Central Peace-Notley constituency, which I am proud to represent, there are farms, small towns, and villages spread over a vast portion of Alberta's beautiful Peace River country. To drive between the furthest communities within the constituency, it takes almost five hours. I have always been quick to point out that this constituency along with other rural constituencies across the province are the economic drivers of this province. This is where the oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture industries take place along with much of the tourism and many other industries and businesses. These industries provide employment and business opportunities, not to mention much of the government of Alberta's revenue that it uses to provide services to all Albertans.

Because of the vastness of the area and the low population density, some government services cost a little bit more than in urban areas. Those living in rural Alberta deserve the same level of essential services as our urban counterparts. Just because the cost of providing these essential services is higher in rural Alberta than other areas doesn't mean they can be removed. Every time we remove a service from rural Alberta, we lose a job, and that job represents a family. When we remove families, we remove other employees that work in other aspects of the economy, providing services for our residents. As you can see, it can have a cascading effect. It's so much better for families and communities to have as many as possible of the people working in the area actually living in the area and keeping our economy and communities strong.

That's why I'm so proud to work with this government to make sure we maintain and improve the services in rural Alberta. In rural Alberta we accept that we may have to travel to larger towns and cities for some services. I continue to advocate for more of these services to be provided in rural Alberta. In many cases we have the facilities to provide the service, and it's easier to move one specialist to 20 people requiring a service than to move 20 people to the specialist. We have communities such as Fairview that are willing to purchase a CT scanner at their cost so that they can provide the service right in the community.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here to represent not a struggling rural Alberta but an area that provides a fantastic lifestyle and a great place to work, recreate, and raise a family, a rural Alberta that is a key part of our province, ready and willing to grow and develop, to prosper, to grow strong, and, in the spirit of the hard-working, industrious, innovative, and generous people who live there, willing to help all of Alberta do the same.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Budget 2021 and Job Creation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier's budget has some, shall we say, irregularities. Yesterday the Premier defended his demand for \$2.5 billion in unmarked bills. Then later in estimates the Finance minister admitted that his jobs now program

is many, many months behind schedule. In fact, last year Ottawa gave the Premier \$185 million to create jobs as long as it was spent before March 31 this year, but it's March 10 and still no program. Premier, your budget calls it jobs now, but isn't it really jobs later or maybe jobs not at all?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government was elected with a focus on jobs and the economy, and that's even more important as we get through the largest collapse in the world economy in nearly a century. That's why we will be rolling out the largest ever job-training program in Alberta history. It will be cofunded. It will be funded by Alberta taxpayers partly through their federal tax dollars coming back here but also through Alberta government investments. The Minister of Labour and Immigration has been working closely with his federal counterpart, and we hope to receive approval for the new program design in the near future.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Ottawa gave the Premier \$185 million for a jobs-training program last year, and he didn't do it. His budget is now promising Albertans that he will spend \$136 million this year. The problem is that the program doesn't exist, and yesterday the Finance minister admitted that he doesn't have permission from the federal government to roll it over and fund it. Why in heaven's name is it in the budget, then? It can at best be described as jobs maybe, and it should not be in a budget document.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that all or most provinces have made a request to the government of Canada to reprofile that funding to the upcoming fiscal year. The important thing is that we design the right program. I know that with the NDP their impulse is always just to spend and spend and spend more regardless of the outcomes. We are designing a very effective demand-driven, employer-led program that will help pave the way for the jobs of the future. And, like other provinces, we're seeking greater flexibility from the federal government and to reprofile those funds into the upcoming fiscal year.

Ms Notley: He's reporting budget money that he doesn't have yet, Mr. Speaker. You know, our fiscal situation is less than stellar, the economy is in trouble, and Albertans are hurting. We need a real plan for jobs in this province that is strategic, immediate, and certain. The budget is not a hypothetical wish list. This Premier is writing his jobs plan on the back of a napkin. He screams at Ottawa for more money but fails to spend it when they give it to him and then books it when he doesn't have it. Premier, why should Albertans trust you to create anything when this is how you plan?

Mr. Kenney: Well, I'll let people who watch this judge about who does the screaming in this place, Mr. Speaker.

It's unfortunate that the member is so down on Alberta. She won't stand and celebrate the projection from the Bank of Montreal that Alberta will lead Canada in economic growth this year, with 6.5 per cent growth. I haven't heard a peep out of her congratulating Albertans on landing the most important new investment in our information technology industry's history, with the up to 2,000 jobs to be created by Infosys, a \$76 billion company. She hasn't talked about mCloud moving their headquarters here or the hundreds of new jobs being created in the sector.

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

Ms Notley: No. I'm talking about a budget document that doesn't have the money that it says it does.

Physician Services Agreement

Ms Notley: Now, yesterday the Health minister attempted to rewrite history, claiming that there was never any fight with doctors, no siree. The entire province is just remembering it wrong. Except, Mr. Speaker, they're not. Albertans haven't forgotten that this minister illegally tore up the contract with doctors and sparked a yearlong fight – yes, fight – with physicians caring for Albertans in a pandemic. The AMA said that he painted doctors as overpaid bandits profiting at the public's expense. Premier, a tentative deal does not erase history. On behalf of your minister will you apologize and correct . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the member's question gives me the opportunity to reflect on her record, which allowed physician compensation to grow from \$3.4 billion to \$5.4 billion while she froze the salaries of nurses. She massively increased compensation for some of the wealthiest people in the province, who are great professionals. We need them. We support them. I am proud of this Minister of Health for working out a thoughtful agreement, which we hope is ratified, which ensures a strong future for physicians in Alberta in a fiscally sustainable future.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this is government by gaslight. Heaven forbid they show any humility or honesty. "It was not a fight – it was war – humiliating, degrading, insulting, devaluing, dehumanizing physicians, calling them liars, greedy, replaceable." That's Dr. Zaidi, who hasn't forgotten when the Health minister showed up at his house at night and yelled at him in front of his wife and children. Premier, is that what you call working out a thoughtful deal? Albertans call it an absolute abuse of authority.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, sometimes I feel like I am in a school playground here, where there's somebody who likes to insult other folks. It's just never-ending. Yesterday they called me a racist; today they're bullying the Health minister for having stood up for his wife against outrageous personal defamation. The bottom line is this: Alberta has now a tentative agreement that will allow a sustainable future in terms of the enormous cost pressures in health care while valuing our physicians. As I've always said, they should not just be paid fairly but generously, and that's what this agreement will lead to.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and his minister cannot erase history. Here are some other things Albertans won't forget: the minister's plan to fire 10,000 front-line health care workers; his plan to Americanize surgical care; his hijacking of EMS services; his failure to fund contact tracing well into the pandemic; and his late-night phone calls intimidating doctors. The simple truth is that this minister will never win a round of he said, she said ever with anyone because he has lost all credibility. Once again, on behalf of your Health minister will you apologize to doctors and all Albertans for trying to erase the history of the last year?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I will commend this Health minister for having done the heavy lifting of taking on a very difficult challenge. If he had not led these difficult negotiations, we would be headed for a \$2 billion increase in that one small envelope of taxpayer spending. It would be unsustainable. But when she refers to Americanizing the health system, what she's talking about is contracting the performance of surgeries within public medicare to chartered facilities, which was the policy of her government. Under her view, an NDP government doing it is just all right but not for Conservatives. It's totally . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The presidents of four faculty associations leading Alberta postsecondary schools have written an op-ed in today's *Edmonton Journal* in which they rightly claim that this Premier's budget is a "circuit breaker" for our province's economic recovery and future prosperity. The cuts since the government took office have piled up to a total of nearly \$700 million. Now the very professors responsible for teaching our future leaders are providing this Premier with a wake-up call. Premier, why won't you listen to these educators and undo your unprecedented cuts to postsecondary here and now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta taxpayers quite rightly expect our college and university administrators to be able to deliver high-quality programs as efficiently as in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, or the rest of the country.

But, Mr. Speaker, since I have the floor, I must underscore my profound disappointment in that member heckling yesterday that I was a, quote, racist. I was a minister of immigration who welcomed 1.3 million permanent residents, overwhelmingly visible minorities, to this country. That comes from a member who has said that Alberta should boycott the only Jewish state in the world. Shame on him.

Mr. Eggen: Well, after three successive cutting UCP budgets, Mr. Speaker, we're well on in the race to the bottom in terms of postsecondary funding here in this province and across the country.

The faculty association presidents of NAIT, SAIT, NorQuest College, Bow Valley College go on to say that students are now considering or actively leaving our province to pursue their studies or their careers. This is known as a brain drain. The presidents warned that Alberta will be "hampered by a dearth of qualified and experienced individuals ready to step into positions of leadership in business... and civil society." To the Premier: why do you continue to cut postsecondary when we need it...

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Still no apology for that outrageous smear yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I'll also remind that this is a member who stood on the front steps of the Legislature calling for no more pipelines. Guess how we fund the universities, Mr. Speaker? In part through the energy sector. But he is now suggesting that students at the U of A, who receive \$18,000 in funding per student, are going to move – I don't know – to UBC, where they receive \$12,000 in per-student funding from an NDP government, or maybe they'll go to the University of Toronto, where they receive \$8,000 in per-student funding. It's ridiculous.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, this government has been cutting for three successive budgets our postsecondary institutions, and it's only getting worse. The costs of tuition continue to go up. Faculty association presidents report massive class sizes, numerous program closures, and thousands of jobs being lost. Premier, you're levelling generational cuts on our postsecondary students. You are suffocating our economic potential. Why don't you step up and stop the damage to postsecondary that you are committing here now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, here are some of the most highly rated universities in Canada: the University of Waterloo gets \$6,300 per student from the government of Ontario; Queen's University, \$8,100

from that government; University of Toronto, \$8,100; McGill gets \$9,500 per student from the government of Quebec; University of Alberta, \$18,000; University of Calgary, \$17,000. These are great institutions, great students, and great faculty, and I'm confident that they can learn to operate a little more efficiently.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout for Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 vaccines represent a return to normal life for all of us, and for some the consequences of not getting a vaccine in short order could be far more grave. We know that a study in *The Lancet* medical journal found that people with Down syndrome over the age of 40 were three times more likely to die of COVID-19. Another study, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, showed that they were four times more likely to be hospitalized and 10 times more likely to die. To the Premier: can you please provide some clarity for disabled Albertans on when they will be vaccinated?

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the very thoughtful question. Dr. Hinshaw and her office are still in consultations with their counterparts throughout the rest of the country on being able to make a determination of what the underlying conditions would be for the inclusion of who is going to be included in phase 2B so that we can make sure we continue to focus the vaccine deployment on those who are the most vulnerable. We look forward to Dr. Hinshaw and her office being able to finish those recommendations and making sure that it's communicated to Albertans, who are asking these questions, as soon as she can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Renaud: Our caucus has been very careful to leave the prioritization of vaccines to medical experts. However, I believe there is no excuse for leaving Albertans in the dark on the timeline for when they'll be vaccinated. As my colleague the Health critic and MLA for Edmonton-City Centre has pointed out, many other jurisdictions, like British Columbia, are allowing people to preregister and learn their tentative date for the first dose. For disabled Albertans, this information can provide a beacon of hope and a light at the end of a very long tunnel. To the Premier: when can we expect a full accounting of vaccination timelines for all disabled Albertans?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, we did make announcements regarding the eligibility in the groups for phase 2. It's in four different, separate groups: phase 2A, B, C, and D. Those with underlying conditions would be included in the vaccine deployment in phase 2B, and we look forward to getting the recommendations and Dr. Hinshaw being able to make it public on which Albertans would be included in phase 2B so that we can continue to make sure that the deployment of our vaccines is focused on those who are the most vulnerable, making sure those folks are getting their vaccines as quickly as possible.

Ms Renaud: I'm glad that we're seeing that tens of thousands of Albertans will have access to register for vaccines, the registration for group B being offered to all Albertans aged 18 to 64 with high-risk underlying health conditions. But for some reason the government has not been specific on why they are not including disabled Albertans in that B group. This delays their access by months. Premier, can you tell us here and now why they do not qualify for the next immediate round of vaccination? This is a life-saving decision. I told you about the risk. Please be specific.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer the question again. Dr. Hinshaw and her office, in consultation with their counterparts throughout the country, are going through the evidence, making sure that we continue to focus on those who are most vulnerable. As we announced, phase 2B would include folks who have underlying conditions, and her office is going to be looking at which underlying conditions should be included for those who would be provided the vaccine in phase 2B. All the Albertans who were included in phase 1 have now been receiving their first doses at least, sometimes second doses, and now folks in 2A are also signing up for their doses.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a question.

School Construction Capital Plan

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's capital plan included 14 new school projects. Airdrie is one of Alberta's fastest growing communities and now boasts a population of more than 70,000 people. We've seen significant enrolment pressures on schools in the area. Catholic high school St. Martin De Porres has long been a priority for expansion. Can the Minister of Infrastructure tell this House what Airdrie residents can look forward to from today's school announcement?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the last six years I've worked in this Chamber and witnessed closely the Member for Airdrie-East championing infrastructure projects in her riding. As a result, I am pleased to inform the member and the residents of Airdrie that St. Martin De Porres will see a new addition and modernization of the existing facility. This is great news for Airdrie and an acknowledgement of the rapid growth the community has seen. I also attended the opening of St. Veronica in summer 2019 and also completed the Northcott prairie . . .

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

Mrs. Pitt: Minister, that's excellent news. Thank you. Given that Airdrie is not the only place in Alberta in need of new schools and given that the capital plan promised 14 new school projects throughout the province and given that investing in schools today provides the facilities that Alberta students need while creating jobs, can the Minister of Infrastructure inform this Assembly what other schools are being funded in the 2021 capital plan?

Mr. Panda: We are building a new Catholic school in Airdrie, a new francophone school in Calgary, a new public high school in Coaldale, a replacement and modernization in Fort Vermilion, a new elementary school in Lethbridge-West, an addition and modernization to a high school in Red Deer, a new francophone replacement school in Sherwood Park, and a new Catholic middle school in Red Deer. We're also designing a new high school in Camrose, a new Catholic school in Edmonton-Castle Downs, a new K to 12 in Evansburg, a new K to 12 in Manning, and a new K to 12 in Milk River.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that this fantastic news of 14 new school projects doesn't mention any of the schools that are already being built and given that the minister has previously said that there are about 60 schools under construction around the province and given that existing schools also require maintenance and upkeep to continue serving students, can the minister comment on

existing school projects as well as the maintenance on older school buildings?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, this year's capital plan for Education of \$1.6 billion will provide funding for the ongoing 62 school projects in addition to the 14 new schools we announced today, and we'll ensure that all these projects will be completed on time. In fact, 19 of those will be completed during this fiscal year and will open soon their doors for students. We're also investing \$651 million to support the day-to-day upkeep of the school facilities. Alberta's government . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Economic Recovery Plan

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the Finance minister published an op-ed about the UCP's budget and their so-called recovery plan. He mentions things like increasing competitiveness and productivity being key to our economic recovery. While these things are certainly important parts of our recovery, there is not one single mention of women getting back into the workforce, despite research that proves that they've been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Also, diversification is not mentioned once. Is this because the minister still thinks of diversification as a luxury?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economic growth and recovery is critical to the province of Alberta, and it's critical to the nation of Canada as a whole. It doesn't surprise me that the members opposite rise up and indirectly speak against those principles. Their policies, that they implemented over their years in government, contradicted those principles and, in fact, encouraged the flight of billions of dollars of capital out of this province, billions of dollars of capital that left less opportunity for all Albertans.

2:10

Ms Ganley: Given that in his op-ed the minister also argued that the government cannot pick winners and losers – he wrote, “We must use taxpayer dollars as if they are our own – with the greatest care and responsibility” – and given that this government bet at least \$7.5 billion on the Keystone XL and lost at least \$1.3 billion on the deal to date, according to the government's own budget, would the minister characterize this as using taxpayer dollars as if they were his own? Would he have invested his own money in this project?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, Keystone XL is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create infrastructure that will provide an opportunity for wealth creation in this province to the tune of \$30 billion over 20 years, moving over 800,000 barrels of oil per day for 30 years, as opposed to the crude-by-rail debacle that was implemented by the previous government, by the members opposite, which purported to move 120,000 barrels per day for two years and risk \$3.7 billion. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Hors d'oeuvres.

Ms Ganley: Given that the Premier promised to create tens of thousands of jobs but that we lost 50,000 jobs before the pandemic even began and given that Alberta has the second-highest unemployment rate in the country, with over 260,000 people currently unemployed, and given that the minister also mentioned in his op-ed that government supports and programs are disincentivizing

Albertans from returning to work, does the minister subscribe to the theory of the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland that unemployed Albertans are lazy and sitting at home eating Cheezies and watching cartoons in the middle of a public health threat?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everybody on this side of the House knows that it'll be hard-working, entrepreneurial Albertans that will ultimately invest, put in effort, take chances, and provide the investment needed to see true economic recovery in this province. Folks on this side of the House are betting on Albertans, unlike members opposite.

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

Education Budget 2021-2022

Ms Hoffman: Twenty thousand new kids are entering the school system this year, and no new funding from this UCP government in the budget, exploding class sizes with stressed out teachers and students: that's the plan from this Minister of Education. Following a difficult year of pandemic learning, there's no new support for students who are left behind, no new funding to help them catch up. It's a sink-or-swim plan for kids, and they deserve better. To the Minister of Education: did you advocate for these students and fail, or did you fail to even advocate for them?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear. Our commitment to funding the education of young Albertans remains, even with the fiscal challenges that the province is facing right now. We are maintaining education funding despite lower enrolment, and in Budget 2021 more than \$130 million in mitigation funding will make sure that school authorities are not penalized for enrolment fluctuations. The COVID-19 mitigation fund is on top of the \$1 billion in funds accessible to the school system this year for pandemic-related expenses, of which three-quarters was directly funded by Albertans.

Ms Hoffman: Given that our students desperately need educational leadership from this government and given that the Minister of Education removed a key objective from the ministry's business plan, "[to] fund the education system to provide learning opportunities that [support and] enable student success" – that is appalling, Mr. Speaker – and given that we now have an Education capital plan that has no new high school space for the city of Edmonton when it's clearly desperately needed, has the government given up? Have they written off Edmonton public students? It sure looks like it in this budget.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I do want to be clear that Alberta continues to have one of the highest funded, best funded education systems in the country. At the end of the 2019-20 school year school boards reported a total of \$383 million in operating surplus and \$221 million in capital reserves. This is a \$21 million increase just in operating reserves from '18-19 and during the pandemic. Now, when it comes to capital, we are focused on protecting lives and livelihoods. These major investments will continue to get Albertans back to work and support the spaces that students across Alberta need.

Ms Hoffman: Given that none of that said anything about high school students going to Edmonton public and given that we just saw also in this budget that there are no high schools for public or

Catholic students in the city of Calgary – Mr. Speaker, that is shocking. We have seen documented evidence over and over again of how desperately Calgary needs new high schools, public and Catholic. Why did this minister, why did this government fail to provide for Calgary? Have they written the city of Calgary off? It sure looks like it in this budget.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this budget it is clear that we're committed to building much-needed schools in every corner of the province. Budget 2021 supports 14 additional school projects. The capital plan also provides \$140 million over three years to support the implementation of the modular classroom program to address the most urgent needs for additional spaces. The \$90 million in Budget 2021 is the highest ever single-year investment to the modular program. We will continue to fund capital projects for students right across Alberta.

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

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month I was proud to propose a big idea for the province's future called the Alberta venture fund. This fund would allow Albertans to invest directly in the growth of Alberta's tech and AI sector. The proposal is based on similar successes in other jurisdictions and similar to Alberta's Ernest Manning's Great Canadian Oil Sands project, where Albertans were able to share in the success of world-class industries right here at home. History tells us that when Albertans are given the opportunity to bet on themselves, great things are possible. Has the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation read our proposal, and does he support the creation of an Alberta venture fund?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working closely with leaders in the tech sector across this province, and we're working hard to position this sector and every sector where we have a competitive advantage for increased investment and growth. I think our track record is starting to speak for itself. In fact, in 2020 both Edmonton and Calgary achieved a record amount of venture capital investment in those cities by Q3, and 2021 is starting out even more positively.

Mr. Bilous: Their growth was despite your government, not because of it.

Given that early in the UCP's mandate they cancelled without any consultation numerous tax credits introduced by our government and other initiatives that were successful in supporting innovation and growth for start-ups and given that the UCP pushed ahead with these cuts despite repeated warnings from the tech community about the negative impact this would have on the province's ecosystem and given that these programs were a result of direct consultation with the business community, will the minister commit to reinstating the investor tax credit and the digital media tax credit, as businesses have called for at albertasfuture.ca?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, this government cancelled failed tax credits that the previous government put into place. We've replaced many of those tax credits with a broad-based approach that assists businesses across sectors and across the province. But we've done

more than that. We've rolled out the innovation employment grant, which is a targeted grant, in fact, a unique grant across the country, the best start-up, early scale-up tech provision and incentive across the nation.

Mr. Bilous: I'd hardly call a 3 to 1 return on investment a failure.

Given that the pandemic has forced businesses and Albertans to rely heavily on technology, which has recently helped boost tech companies, and given that more support will be needed to sustain the momentum and given that we've also proposed a host of other additional supports in our discussion paper, which came from industry – supporting and attracting tech accelerators, establishing a dedicated R and D fund – will this government listen to business and provide additional support to grow the tech ecosystem? By the way, I'm hosting a town hall tomorrow night. Why don't you drop in and hear from industry directly yourself?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, this government and the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation are working closely with tech leaders and business leaders from across the province to ensure that we can position this sector for increased investment attraction and growth. Our policies are working. Infosys recently announced that they're moving 500 folks to Calgary and potentially expanding with another 1,500 positions, mCloud Technologies Corp. is relocating its corporate headquarters to Calgary, and Suncor is moving its Ontario offices to Calgary. This government's policies are working.

2:20

Hospital Construction

Mr. Dang: This government has been playing games with the people of south Edmonton since taking office. They delayed the south Edmonton hospital in their first budget and have continued to stall since then despite the real need and the fact that my constituents have been waiting for decades. This government continues to waste money on the embarrassing energy war room and gives billions of dollars away with a corporate handout to their friends and donors. Minister, why do the health care needs of my constituents take a back seat to your job-killing handouts?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of the capital projects that we were able to announce in Budget '20, including those for Edmonton. We look forward to having further announcements very soon for further capital projects for the Edmonton and capital region. We're really excited to be able to announce those soon. Stay tuned, Mr. Speaker, and to the member as well.

Mr. Dang: Given that it's not just the people of south Edmonton who have been left waiting for the UCP government to notice their needs and given that Red Deer has repeatedly been promised a hospital redevelopment by this Premier and that he committed a hundred million dollars to this long-awaited project and given that this budget has only \$5 million set aside, only one-twentieth of what was committed, to the Infrastructure minister: explain to me why the government misled the people of Red Deer and continues to put their hospital on the back burner while paying off their wealthy friends and donors.

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. We announced in Budget '20 a budget of a hundred million dollars for redevelopment of the Red Deer hospital. We will continue. Nothing has changed with that budgeted amount. The member is playing funny with the amounts that might be allotted for different years. The amount is

still the same. The scope is still the same. In fact, we're still working with those in the community and with AHS to look at what is going to be included in phase 1. There's still a lot of work to be done on how the different amounts of work on the Red Deer hospital development are going to be phased and scheduled, and we look forward to that work being completed.

Mr. Dang: Given that this budget removes \$130 million from the Calgary cancer centre, which the UCP once referred to as a fancy box, and given that the minister wants to waffle about cash flows and talk about that all he wants, the truth is simple: the minister is either cutting the funding or delaying the project, and no amount of spin can change this. Minister, which is it? Is the funding being cut for this critical project, or are you planning to follow in the footsteps of previous Conservative governments and continue to delay this critical project? It's got to be one or the other.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the \$1.4 billion funding for the Calgary cancer centre remains unchanged. The project is tracking on time, on budget. In fact, we accelerated some of this spend last year during the pandemic to – you know, in multiyear, long-term projects like that, the contractor sometimes gives us the forecast for the cash flow. Some years they spend more based on the progress, construction progress, and some years they spend less, but the project is tracking on time, on budget.

Seniors Advocate

Ms Sigurdson: Over 1,200 residents in continuing care have tragically passed away due to COVID-19. Low staffing and neglect are not new issues, but they have been amplified because of the pandemic. I've received many phone calls to my office of residents being left in their own waste, not being bathed, and not able to take the packaging off their food. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing. Navigating the seniors' housing and services is complicated, and reform is needed. Will you establish an independent seniors advocate to support seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We still have a seniors advocate. The seniors advocate is now housed in the Health Advocate's office and will continue to work on behalf of seniors who have questions. We found that most of the concerns that seniors have for the seniors advocate are related to health anyways, so that office will continue to work for our seniors and on behalf of seniors to be able to help them with questions they might have about the health system and advocate for them on their behalf.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that in B.C. their independent Seniors Advocate is speaking to the media and releasing reports with detailed recommendations on how the government can better support seniors and given that in Alberta the UCP's Health Advocate, the former executive director of their political party, I might add, has been shockingly silent, Minister, if you actually cared about ensuring that the lives and conditions of seniors are improved after this pandemic, why don't you create this office of an independent seniors advocate?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to be able to speak about our appointments throughout the last couple of years in this government. We have not only appointed the former leader of a political party who ran against us in the last election; we have actually as a government appointed the NDP former Minister of

Energy. The problem with the member is that she wants anyone who has any relation to conservatism to be prohibited from being appointed. That's not the case. We're going to appoint a wide range of Albertans who want to serve their community, who are talented and able to serve their community. That's what we're going to do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Hors d'oeuvres.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP clearly does not want to establish an independent office to reform systemic issues and help seniors navigate government services, the UCP should at least have a public inquiry into the tragedy in continuing care. Given that Quebec and Ontario have launched independent reviews of their continuing care systems and COVID-19 but the UCP continually rejects our calls for an inquiry and given that they prioritized the embarrassment of an energy war room over the well-being of seniors, to the Minister of Health: why won't you call a public inquiry into the continuing care system?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We actually did begin an independent third-party review in response to the pandemic. We began that in 2020. We have now received the report, and now we're reviewing the report of that review so we can be able to release it publicly in the near future.

Not only that; we began in 2019 a review of continuing care legislation, a review of our facility-based continuing care system, and the work of our hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who was chairing that work. We look forward to getting those recommendations as well so that we can continue to make our continuing care system . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Economic Recovery Plan and Tax Policies

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economists and the media have criticized Alberta's successful oil and gas sector and have argued that a provincial sales tax is a more stable and efficient source of revenue. However, Alberta's recovery plan and robust budget rightly focuses largely on attracting investment to the province to spur economic growth rather than implementing a PST. My question is for the Minister of Finance. Can you please explain why we need to attract investment instead of implementing a PST?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the question. Right now economic recovery and growth is job number one. To introduce a new tax or increased taxes would greatly impede that necessary economic growth and recovery. Economic growth and recovery is not only critical to job creation and to create opportunities for Albertans, but in the long term it's critically important for expanded fiscal capacity and additional government revenues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that our government is focused on getting Albertans back to work and given that our government is committed to jobs, the economy, and pipelines and given that Alberta's government is committed to keeping its corporate tax rate at 8 per

cent, to the minister: what other initiatives are being done to encourage investment and get Albertans back to work?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are positioning this province for disproportionate economic growth and recovery by ensuring that we have the most competitive business environment possible. We've accelerated our job creation tax cut. We've implemented the innovation employment grant, the single best incentive for research and tech start-ups in the country. We've created Invest Alberta. We've recapitalized the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. Our policies are working. We're seeing increased investment attraction into this province, and with it will come increased job opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that a large number of Albertans do not support a PST and given that implementing a PST would require an amount of discretionary income that Albertans can spend, once again to the minister: can you assure Albertans that this government will not implement a provincial sales tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, now would be the worst time to increase taxes or impose a new tax on Albertans and Alberta job creators. Along with economic recovery we're continuing to focus on delivering government services most efficiently. That's why in Budget 2021 we've included a fiscal anchor, bringing our cost of delivering government services to align with other provinces on a per capita basis. We will become at least as efficient as other provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a question.

2:30 Pulse Crops and Agricultural Diversification

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plant protein market is forecasted to hit \$14.3 billion by 2025. Alberta has a rich supply of pulse crops like peas, lentils, and chickpeas to meet this increasing global demand. The government ought to be making adjustments to help producers leverage their production by having more plant protein processing in Alberta. To the minister of agriculture. I read your budget, and there's nothing in it to support this booming industry. Why are you neglecting them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of agriculture is working hard to implement our investment and value-added strategy, which is focused on diversification. We have a goal of drawing in \$1.4 billion in investment by 2023-24. Ways he's working on that are, of course, through our job-creation tax cut; utilizing the investment arm of our team, which seeks out and draws in investments to our province; creating a simple investment window for investors; focusing on eight subsectors with the highest potential for investment; and attracting canola producing, plant proteins, pork processing, cannabis and hemp, greenhouse industry, malt – and I've got a lot more to talk about on the supplementals.

Ms Sweet: I'm talking about plant proteins, Minister.

Given that the plant processing centre in Leduc recently received \$2.6 million from a federal program to expand while the UCP did nothing, it is becoming increasingly clear the UCP is not a leader in agricultural diversification and would rather wait for the federal government to act, and given that this fits in with the UCP's aimless budget, that does little to diversify the economy and to lead the province into the future, again to the minister: when will you take leadership of your own, invest in innovative agriculture, and stop hiding behind the federal programs?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our minister of agriculture, who, I will point out to the House, is a farmer, does focus on plant proteins on his family farm. I do know that his family lives close to my constituency though I know that the Minister of Finance might feel that he's in competition sometimes with plant proteins because, of course, he's a beef producer. But what my point is to the hon. member: we are focused on standing up for our agriculture industry. I just started to do a list here of some of the stuff that the minister of agriculture has been working on to do just that, including increasing the AFSC borrowing limit to \$3.6 billion. He's also doubled the individual lending limit from \$15 million to \$30 million at the AFSC. I've got a couple more things to say . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Minister. I'm glad to hear that the minister wants farmers to take on more debt.

Given that the UCP has called economic diversification a long-term luxury and then took two years to realize that it's important and given that protein processing is a clear opportunity to diversify Alberta's agricultural sector as multibillion-dollar companies like McDonald's begin to offer completely plant-based menus and processing plants are being developed across the country, again to the minister: will you commit today to investing in plant protein processing so Alberta producers can be in position to benefit from this expanding market?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and respond to this question. The minister of agriculture and this government broadly are positioning the Alberta agriculture industry as a whole to be most competitive by cutting red tape, by modernizing our regulatory environment, by ensuring we have the most competitive jurisdiction from a tax standpoint, and our policies are working. We're already seeing improved interest in investment proponents coming into this province and establishing value-added processing capacity. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Odour Issues in Edmonton-West Henday Constituency

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, the odour in my constituency from a composting business has been described by some as an abhorrent, horrendous stench. My constituents have pleaded for a resolution to this issue for years. They have said that not only can they often not enjoy the outdoors, but in some instances they can't even open up their windows because the odour will fill their homes. A solution is needed, and my constituents have not gotten one. This is a complex issue, and action is needed to resolve it for all parties involved. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: will you commit today to get involved to resolve this issue with my constituents and the business?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the facility the hon. member is referring to, but if he reaches out to my office, we'll be happy to look into it for him.

Mr. Carson: Given that correspondence my office forwarded about this issue in both November 2020 and February '21 has gone unanswered by this minister and given that my constituents have been watching and waiting for that department to take meaningful action on this issue, why haven't you responded to the very real concerns that my office has forwarded to you on behalf of my constituents? Will you respond to that recent letter and work with my constituents to find a solution or, at the very least, please explain how this situation impacting the quality of life of my constituents is acceptable?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have not seen a letter from the hon. member cross my desk. I just reached out to my chief of staff to check to see if that letter has been missed in some way. Again, if the hon. member reaches out to our office on that specific facility, we'll be happy to look into it for him.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that this long-standing issue has gone on so long that the city of Edmonton has now taken unprecedented action and given that there seems to be no effective mechanism in place to resolve disputes like this and given that I'm fully committed to assist the minister in any way I can to help come to a solution and connect him and his department with these stakeholders, to the minister: please explain to my constituents what the path forward is, will you commit to working with me to resolve this issue for my constituents, and when can we expect an answer?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should take yes for an answer.

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

Skilled Trades Promotion

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

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think one of the first things that we need to do is reiterate and repeat the message that the member opposite just said, which is to reinforce that a trade certificate has the same value, merit, and worth as a university degree. I know that that's firmly believed by my colleagues on this side of the House. Furthermore, I think we also need to ensure that those individuals have great certainty and a better understanding around the financial security that comes with trades-related occupations and, additionally, other measures as well, which I'll get to shortly.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta's population is aging and more baby boomers are retiring every year, with a large number of those retirees being tradespeople, and that this is creating an ever-increasing shortage of skilled trades workers and given that making trades training accessible to as many Albertans as possible will be crucial to filling labour shortages, to the minister: in what ways are you looking into ensuring that skilled trades training is accessible to everyone, including those in remote locations?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that we're doing, of course, is working with our incredibly strong network of colleges and other institutions that deliver trades programming across the province. As well, we're also partnering with a number of different organizations to expand the availability of trades programming. We're working with Careers: the Next Generation to ensure that we have the registered apprenticeship program available in every high school across the province. Furthermore, we're also working with Women Building Futures and a variety of different organizations so that individuals from every corner of the province have access to these important opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member is right. We do need to do a better job of providing more clarity to our students around the labour market outcomes associated with program choices. Indeed, when you look at the information, oftentimes individuals that pursue trades-related occupations actually earn higher incomes on average immediately after completion and have less debt than counterparts that choose other forms of higher education. So we need to make sure that students have clarity over those choices. As well, through the work that we're doing with Careers, we can expand more advocacy into our K to 12 schools to ensure that their options are clear.

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

2:40 Economic Development and Investment Attraction

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the economic slowdown and the hostility of the previous administration towards our energy sector and, frankly speaking, to business in general, head offices moved out of our province as businesses went under and others declined to move their operations to our province. To the minister: have we seen a reversal of this trend?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Not only has this trend reversed, but according to Statistics Canada we've seen 10,000 businesses open during the pandemic. Ten thousand businesses. That's a vote in favour of Alberta as the best place to start a business. This proves that our efforts in improving the regulatory environment and generally ensuring our business environment is most competitive – those policies are working.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We truly have reason to be optimistic. Given that the party opposite piled on costs, regulations, carbon tax on businesses operating in Alberta and given that under our government the tax range is now lower than most jurisdictions in North America and given that the budget contains line items for the investment and growth fund and funding for Invest Alberta, to the minister: can you inform the House of what we are doing to engage companies to help them set up and grow here in Alberta?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've seen some notable successes in recent weeks, with major companies moving their operations here to Alberta. Invest Alberta has played a part in recruiting both mCloud, a Vancouver-based company that is now moving their headquarters to Calgary and bringing with it hundreds of jobs, and Infosys, which is moving at least 500 jobs to Calgary. The members opposite may not be aware of either of these stories as they have yet to comment publicly on the good news that Alberta's tech sector is building such exciting momentum. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's so great to hear members opposite so excited about our plan and given that our 2021 budget focuses on rebuilding after COVID-19 and given that its aim is to grow rather than tax it away after the aftershock of the pandemic, to the minister: how are you and this government continuing to attract businesses like Infosys to diversify and grow our economy?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've established Invest Alberta to go out across this country, across this continent, and around the world to present Alberta's incredible value proposition for business investment to come here to this province and create jobs and opportunities and expanded fiscal capacity that will increase government revenues. Last week the Bank of Montreal is now predicting that Alberta will lead the nation in economic growth in 2021. Our economic policies are working.

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 67. The motion reads as follows:

“Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2020-2021 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to the Committee of Supply.”

I also rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 68. Motion 68 reads as follows: “Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2020-2021 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for three hours on Tuesday, March 16, 2021.”

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has risen.

Bill 54

Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Dreesen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021.

Last fall we announced a historic \$815 million irrigation investment into their infrastructure, converting open-air canals into hundreds of kilometres of pipelines, building two new reservoirs, expanding two reservoirs in southern Alberta, increasing irrigated acres by over 200,000 acres, 8,000 new jobs resulting from this investment, all within existing water allocation. This legislative amendment would clarify commercial activities in the existing act to increase investment opportunities like the one I just mentioned and also enable irrigation districts to pass bylaws allowing them to set board term limits.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a first time]

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

Bill 213

Traffic Safety (Maximum Speed Limit for Provincial Freeways) Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 213, the Traffic Safety (Maximum Speed Limit for Provincial Freeways) Amendment Act, 2021.

The bill, if passed, will increase the maximum speed limit of select divided highways in Alberta from 110 kilometres an hour to 120 kilometres an hour and clarify the important role of the Minister of Transportation in maintaining safety on our highways. Highways impacted by this bill include divided highways outside of urban areas that the Department of Transportation deems safe. The aim of this bill is to maintain the safety of Albertans, improve the commutes of Albertans across the province, and increase the

synchronization between posted speed limits and the speed that highways are engineered and constructed for.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 213 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, in the last 35 years Alberta taxpayers spent more than \$1.5 billion on treating toxic waste from all provinces across Canada. Given the fiscal situation that Alberta is in, I have written to federal ministers to fund \$338.4 million over the next four years to support the operations at the Swan Hills Treatment Centre. I have five copies of the letters I wrote to them, and I table that, as promised in the budget estimates review.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of a FOIP of an issues manager of the government. It was discussed yesterday in estimates for TBF. The minister said that he couldn't respond without the documents, so I'm happy to table them as per the request of the minister.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon, this evening, and tomorrow morning for the consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Executive Council in the Rocky Mountain Room. This evening the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Labour and Immigration in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General in the Grassland Room. Finally, tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Children's Services in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in the aptly named Grassland Room.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:49 p.m.]

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