



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 6, 2021

Day 92

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.

Tuesday, April 6, 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, 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.

Mr. Ty Lund
March 31, 1938, to February 28, 2021

The Speaker: Hon. members, please remain standing as we pay tribute to a former member who recently passed away. Today I'd like to welcome members of the Lund family and their friends to the Speaker's gallery. Ty Lund served six terms in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta as the Progressive Conservative Member for Rocky Mountain House from 1989 to 2012. During his tenure he was the minister of environmental protection; the minister of agriculture, food and rural development; the Minister of Infrastructure; the minister of government services; and the minister of infrastructure and transportation. Before turning to provincial politics, Mr. Lund was a farmer, then a councillor and the reeve of the municipal district of Clearwater. He was awarded the Queen Elizabeth jubilee award in 2002. Mr. Lund spoke of how proud he was of taking part in, quote, managing the affairs of the province and working for the best interest of Albertans. Ty Lund passed away on February 28, 2021, at the age of 82.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember Mr. Lund each as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. Please refrain from joining her.

Ms Elhard:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is with our greatest admiration and respect – you know, there is a gratitude to members of the families who share the burdens of public service, and today I'd like to welcome those Lund family members to the Speaker's gallery who are present here. As I call your name, please remain standing until all members have been introduced: Mr. Lund's brother Mark Lund; his wife, Wendy; their daughters, Mr. Lund's nieces, Hannah, Taylor, and Clara; Hannah's partner, Conrad David; Mr. Lund's sister Sharlene von Hollen; his niece Marcine Olsen; and close

family friends Ashton Buller, Robert Duiker, Fran Duiker, and Rose McComb. Hon. members, please help me welcome and thank these family members of Mr. Ty Lund.

Please feel free to be seated.

We also have one other very special guest today joining us in the Speaker's gallery. Speaking of gratitude that we all owe to family members, perhaps the people who bear the burden the most are our children, and the Minister of Health's son Archer Shandro has joined us today. Welcome, Archer.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Former Member and Cabinet Minister Ty Lund

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great opportunity to rise today to pay tribute to a former MLA for Rocky Mountain House as well as a former environment minister, Mr. Tyrone Lund, or Ty.

I want to start, first off, Mr. Speaker, by acknowledging, as you have, the presence of Ty's family in the Chamber with us today and say through you, Mr. Speaker, to them on behalf of, I think, all members of the Chamber: welcome to Alberta's Legislature, and thank you for sharing Ty with us all those years.

As you noted, Mr. Speaker, Ty passed away on February 28 of this year at 82 years of age. Ty represented a constituency in an area of the province that both you and I call home and have the privilege of representing in the 30th Legislature. Several significant, great politicians have represented this area: Alfred Hooke, who was the longest serving MLA in the history of our province and saw central Alberta through the Great Depression – in fact, he and former MLA Lund together represented my constituency for 15 of the 30 Legislatures that our province has had since Confederation – one of our true giants of central Alberta, the late, great Bob Clark, your friend and mentor, who represented part of my constituency as well; and, of course, my dear friend, the late, great Myron Thompson, who was one of my great mentors; and Ty's mentor and one of the great politicians that came from Rocky Mountain House, Helen Hunley, who was the first female cabinet minister of a full-line portfolio in our province and the first female Lieutenant Governor of this province.

I mention these names not to brag about the best that central Alberta has sent to this Chamber, though we have sent some of the great giants, but to say that Ty can and should be mentioned in the light of some of the true champions of our region and in the same class as the greatest of representatives both here in Edmonton and in Ottawa.

Ty was born in Rocky Mountain House in 1938 and called Clearwater county his home for his entire life. He would go on to serve as the MLA for his home constituency for six terms from 1989 to 2012, a total of 8,435 days in provincial office. Mr. Speaker, that's over 23 years of service in this Assembly and service to his constituents. That was on top of almost a decade of service as a municipal leader before he ran for MLA, first as a councillor and then a reeve for the MD of Clearwater. He also served on various community organizations like the Kinsmen Club and the Rotary Club, and he was a man of deep and abiding faith and was active in his church community.

During his time in government Ty was often referred to as Premier Ralph Klein's Minister of Everything. During his lengthy political career Ty served as minister of environmental protection, minister of agriculture, minister of food and rural development, Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation, and minister

of government services. Ty will be remembered by many current and former members of this Assembly as an adept and talented politician, which he certainly was, Mr. Speaker. In fact, in the last leadership race for the Premier inside this province I called Ty for some help with selling memberships, and, sure enough, he showed up a week later with over 200 memberships, from retirement. Ty always still had it.

His talents in this Assembly and in the broader political arena were more a result of pragmatism rather than partisanship. He could be opinionated, to be sure, and those in the gallery know that, but ideology wasn't what guided Ty. He was guided by his values: hard work, honesty, and fairness. In Ty's maiden speech in this very building, in this very Chamber, in June 1989 he expressed his reason for entering provincial politics and his understanding of the fundamental role of government. He said:

My decision to enter provincial politics grew out of the desire to serve the public on a broader scale . . . I felt a need to promote some convictions which I hold very strongly, convictions about the role government should play in the lives of people.

He would go on to say:

You will see that I don't believe government can or should do all things for all people all the time. Rather, it is a facilitator . . .

I believe that the role of government is to keep law and order in the land and to provide essential services like education, health care, transportation, and to direct the activities to meet the goals of its citizens. Our duty is to make sure that everyone is treated fairly under the law, to safeguard their freedom, and to carry out the will of the majority, while protecting the rights of the minority.

I think that description sums up Ty's views on politics very well, Mr. Speaker: straightforward, to the point, and no nonsense.

1:40

He certainly loved his political life, but much more than that, Ty loved to farm. In his same maiden speech, in June 1989, Ty spoke of his deep rural roots in Clearwater county, saying:

I . . . am a third generation farmer. My grandfather, my father, and myself cleared land, some of it by hand. I am proud of the fact that the land title on my home quarter has only had the name Lund on it.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, Ty would go on to serve for many years as Alberta's environment minister. It was a role he came to honestly because, you see, Ty believed deeply in the role that farmers and ranchers play in conservation of our land, air, and water. He said:

The farm family is an indispensable part of Alberta society. The farming community is environmentally conscious. As stewards of the land farmers are serious about protecting the land because it is their future. We take our roles in preserving the environment very seriously.

Ty was always a strong advocate for the environment and for rural Alberta and the agriculture industry, and he shared his love of agriculture and young people by volunteering with local 4-H clubs. He gave back so much, always with an eye to the future, building a better Alberta for generations to come.

I want to stress, Mr. Speaker, that Ty was always, first and foremost, a farmer. His first chief of staff likes to tell a story from when he was agriculture minister, coming back from a trade mission to Russia. He had a green diplomatic passport. Russian security was giving him a hard time getting on the airplane; they wanted to understand how he got the passport. His chief of staff was trying to tell them that he was a minister of agriculture in Canada. The security wouldn't let the chief of staff answer the question, and Ty kept telling the security guards: I'm a farmer from Rocky Mountain House. All he had to say was that he was a minister and

he would've gotten through, but he stated who he was first and foremost.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I'm very blessed to have known Ty Lund. He was more than my predecessor; he was a mentor and my friend. It is a great honour to serve as the MLA for the constituency that Ty represented for six terms and continue some of the work that he began when he was environment minister. Each day that I serve in this place, I aim to serve my constituents with the same commitment and enthusiasm that Ty served them with. I will miss Ty's advice and his kindness and legendary stories. I will miss his friendship and his passion for our home. Ty was a determined and dedicated man, often intense and persuasive, but he was always guided by his huge, genuine servant heart.

I extend my sincere condolences to Ty's family and to the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and to my colleagues here in the Assembly on the loss of a leader and, most importantly, on the loss of a friend. [Standing ovation]

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we remember former Progressive Conservative MLA Ty Lund, who passed away at the age of 82. MLA Lund was born in Rocky Mountain House on March 31, 1938. His family had been farmers for two generations, and he was proud to continue that family tradition. MLA Lund also was involved in his community. He was involved in a number of organizations like the local 4-H club and the Kinsmen Club. He began his political career as a councillor for the municipal district of Clearwater in Rocky Mountain House in 1980, serving as a reeve for the last four years, until 1989.

In 1989 he was elected as the MLA for Rocky Mountain House under the PC Party, a seat he held for six consecutive terms, until 2012. During his time as an MLA MLA Lund served in several cabinet positions. In 1994 Premier Ralph Klein elevated him to cabinet as the minister of environmental protection. MLA Lund later held portfolios in agriculture, food, and rural development; infrastructure and transportation; and government services. Former MLA Lund will be remembered for his longevity in provincial politics and be sorely missed by his family.

On behalf of the Official Opposition NDP caucus I would like to thank MLA Lund and his family for his years of public service and sacrifice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

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

Health Care Workers

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, as we ride the rising crest of the third wave of COVID-19, I want to take a moment to speak to health care workers across Alberta, and the first thing I want to say is thank you. I can't even begin to imagine what you've lived through this past year, the fear and anxiety you've faced as you've stepped up time after time to care for our friends, families, and loved ones in some of the most difficult times of their lives. Thank you for being there when we could not. Thank you for tending to their most intimate needs, for preparing their food, washing their sheets, and cleaning their rooms, for holding their hands, for comforting their fear, easing their suffering, and affirming their humanity, their worth as they left this world. Thank you for your dedication, your commitment to put their needs, their health

first, even at potential risk of your own, and for using every tool at your disposal, every last drop of effort to do it.

Secondly, I want to say that I'm sorry. I'm sorry that it's been so much worse than it had to be, that you've had to bear the brunt of a lack of leadership by your government, for the disruption they forced you to endure as they put their own political agendas ahead of supporting you in the midst of likely the most difficult health crisis our province has ever faced, that your investment of blood, sweat, and tears has so often been met with disrespect, with callous indifference to the impacts of their decisions on your work and your own physical and mental health, that your work continues to be undermined by individuals, even elected officials, who deny the reality of what you face in an utterly inexplicable refusal to fairly and consistently enforce our public health restrictions, for the weight of the unthinkable decisions you've had to make and for the weight, the scars you will bear after this is done. But for now this continues. It didn't have to be this way, but sadly it is.

Despite all this, I know that all of you, the worn and weary, are committed to seeing this through. Thank you for that, too, and I am sorry. You're seen. You are valued. You are heroes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Federal NDP Resolution on Armed Forces

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 9, 1917, the Canadian Armed Forces participated in the beginning of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, which resulted in the deaths of 3,598 Canadians and another 7,000 wounded. On the 114th anniversary of this significant moment in Canadian military history the NDP want to thank them by phasing them out. Keep in mind that the federal NDP and the provincial NDP are the same party, with one membership.

It isn't unusual for the NDP to come up with some radical ideology, but I was astounded by the motion being brought forward. The motion states that an NDP government would "commit to phasing out the Canadian Armed Forces," that Armed Forces units claim needless lives and pose an overall net negative impact on the communities where our members serve. I am assuming from this that the NDP see every army as the same and that they have no appreciation for the sacrifices of our Armed Forces. What's the NDP's message on this? Thanks for the freedom, but you're no longer required? The motion goes on to state that "militaries and war are a historic institution with no place in a modern society" and then suggests that Canada should take the path of turning over the defence of our country to another country, likely one with an army.

Despite the naive viewpoint of the NDP, threats of armed conflict remain. Not only do our Armed Forces' members protect us from external threats and participate in peacekeeping missions overseas; they support our communities here at home. In times of crisis our forces' members have always stepped up to support our communities; through natural disasters, as an example. This is also a complete disregard of the families, the spouses, partners, and children. Your sacrifice was not for someone the NDP holds in high regard. It was for someone the NDP sees as causing needless death.

Nobody wishes for war, but the men and women who serve our country are ready to defend this nation. They deserve more respect, and if the NDP had the ability to feel more than just anger and hatred, then this would be the moment they'd feel ashamed. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, order. I would just remind all members about members' statements. The long-standing tradition of the Assembly is that members go uninterrupted by heckling for whatever reason, even if that's for encouragement.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Case Increase

Ms Notley: Four thousand new cases in just four days. Mr. Speaker, the third wave is here, and it is rising. We must take every measure we can to protect Albertans and protect our economy from the rapid spread of COVID-19, yet faced with deeply concerning numbers, the Premier failed to act over the long weekend, instead opting for another lecture. What happened? The bars were packed, the roads were busy, and GraceLife had record attendance. The Premier himself said that his modelling showed a thousand people in hospital, and still he did nothing. To the Premier: what is he waiting for?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'll be having an announcement with Dr. Hinshaw and the Premier later on this afternoon. I invite the hon. member to watch along. But she is right that the cases are increasing. It is a concern for the government and for those in the Ministry of Health. We will continue to monitor the situation, and we will continue to make sure that our public health officials have all the resources available to them and AHS as well, to make sure that throughout the pandemic people have all the care that they need, in AHS facilities and otherwise, to make sure that we're protecting lives and livelihoods throughout this pandemic.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the Legislature. We could use an answer now and in here.

There's no doubt that business owners and workers will be impacted. I know how hard this pandemic has been on them. But there are just two theories for protecting the economy: one, you step up with real support for businesses and for workers, or two, you look the other way while more Albertans get sick, more die, and ultimately our economic recovery still fails. Ontario, B.C., Saskatchewan, and Quebec have all opted for the first option. Why is our Premier opting for the second?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to supporting businesses across Alberta, our relaunch grant supported over 70,000 businesses here in Alberta. We've had applications for support of up to \$600 million right here in Alberta. We would put this program up against any other province, and when it comes to turnaround time, it's about 10 days' time. If further health measures are required, we'll continue to be there with expanded supports for businesses in Alberta.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of millions of dollars that still haven't gotten out the door.

Now, meanwhile the Premier wags his finger, but as photos of the bars on Sunday night show, it's not working. He can't enforce the rules on his own caucus, let alone groups like GraceLife who put people at risk whenever they get together. That's the thing about losing your moral authority, Mr. Speaker; eventually you just lose all authority. Will the Premier commit to stop blaming Albertans, put in new restrictions, enforce them consistently, and then actually save lives and livelihoods?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we will have an announcement later on today. But, look, the questions about enforcement, as the member has brought up a couple of times: just to remind the member, even though she was a former Premier of the province, politicians

should not be interfering in enforcement decisions but should leave those decisions to the agencies who can enforce the laws that we decide either as the executive or as the Legislature. We'll continue to make sure that AHS has the resources that they need to be able to enforce the public health measures and, as well, any other agency that they may have need of to assist them in doing so.

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

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier is wondering why his approval rating keeps dropping, look at the backwards, regressive curriculum he wants to teach our kids for a hint. This curriculum contains serious errors in fact, it ignores modern teaching practices, it diminishes the role of human-caused climate change, it fails to follow the recommendations of the TRC, it contains plagiarized sections, and, worst of all, it simply does not prepare our kids for the future. To the Premier. His example of leadership is questionable at best. Can he not understand why no one wants his curriculum being taught to the leaders of tomorrow?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure everyone here that the curriculum has been created over a very, very long, detailed process that lasted well over 19 months, took into account the previous version of the curriculum. We had educational leaders, we had experts in the areas of various subjects, we had over 100 teachers involved in the redrafting of it, and we also had deans and academics. All were involved to create this curriculum.

Ms Notley: And today those deans said that they do not endorse it. Now, the Premier says that, quote, there's widespread acclaim, but here's what people actually say. It perpetuates rather than addresses systemic racism: that's the chiefs of Treaty 6. I would call it a Trivial Pursuit or *Jeopardy!* curriculum: that's U of A professor Dr. Carla Peck. To be blunt, I feel it's flaming garbage: that's Taylor Schroeter, one of 33,000 Alberta parents already organizing against this. To the Premier: does the curriculum teach kids what the words "widespread" and "acclaim" mean? He might want to drop in for a class if it does.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, all students will learn the history of racism and discrimination in North America and, specifically, in Alberta. I would like to read a quote from Mohamad Awada, the co-chair of Alberta's Anti-Racism Advisory Council. I quote: it warms my heart as an immigrant raising my two kids in Calgary to see our government acknowledging the Muslim community in one of the most significant ways, which is education; I believe that this will be the start of a new era for Alberta, where all students will learn about the diverse, inclusive, and multicultural communities that form our unique society.

Ms Notley: Well, I would suggest that the minister listen to the students who are Métis, who are indigenous, who are francophone. Just those ones today have talked about how they are not seen in this curriculum.

Now, this curriculum copied off Wikipedia. It included massive bits of plagiarism. Does the Premier not understand that the reason no one wants to see his personal values in the curriculum is because those values, just like him, are significantly out of touch with what Alberta is and what Alberta parents . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to hear these allegations surface over the weekend. As the members opposite know, curriculum documents in Alberta are not footnoted with citations. Hundreds – hundreds – of people have had a hand in drafting the new K to 6 curriculum through a very transparent review process. This includes subject matter experts, teachers, and my department staff that have worked directly on the curriculum. I'm sure the member opposite does not want to accuse any of those people of plagiarism. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a question.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I was gobsmacked last week when the Premier claimed he received, quote, widespread endorsement for his new curriculum. My inbox certainly suggests otherwise, and to date five school boards at least have publicly refused to participate in piloting the new curriculum due to concerns that have been raised by their subject matter experts, thousands of parents, teachers, students, indigenous leaders, and so on. The negative feedback is overwhelming. Will the current government actually listen to the broad opposition to the curriculum, or are their earplugs still in?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are listening, and in fact we're listening to all Albertans. We want to hear from every single one. I want them to go to alberta.ca/curriculum and fill in the survey, read the actual 500-plus pages of the curriculum. The purpose of a pilot for the draft curriculum is to provide valuable in-classroom feedback to effect potential changes for the final document. School divisions can opt to pilot all or some of the draft curriculum subjects. For example, they could pilot math or just language arts. If some school divisions do not wish to pilot, they will simply not be able to provide direct in-class feedback or potential changes. We want them to pilot it.

Ms Hoffman: Well, they've given their feedback, Minister, and they think that your curriculum is a mess.

One of the major concerns with the curriculum is that it outright ignores the calls to action through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and chooses to focus more on American and European history than Canadian history. We had the pleasure of being joined today by Charles Barner, an 11-year-old Métis student from here in Edmonton. He noted that the Minister of Education promised that all students would see themselves in the curriculum, but he said that he doesn't, not one bit. To the Premier: will you explain to 11-year-old Charles why the UCP government has failed him so miserably and why his own culture and heritage are taking a back seat in grade 2 to Genghis Khan and Charlemagne?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit content will be taught in every single grade, from kindergarten all the way through to grade 6 and beyond, as we develop the future curriculum. This was a very important commitment we made to Albertans, and I'm glad to say that we delivered on it. I actually have a quote from Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild, who was a commissioner on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, who believes that this curriculum is consistent with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I quote: education in general is the key to reconciliation; with the work done today . . .

2:00

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

Ms Hoffman: Elder Betty, the Métis Nation, Treaty 6 all outright refute what you just said, Minister. They are upset, and they want you to go back to the drawing board. We've been swamped with thousands upon thousands of inquiries from parents, teachers, subject matter experts, students, and so on. Albertans are begging this Premier to hit the brakes on this bogus curriculum and go back to the drawing board and do real consultation on what is taught in Alberta classrooms. To the Premier. I'm putting forward a motion for an emergency debate this afternoon on the lack of support for this new curriculum. Will the Premier allow the debate to continue, and will he commit to being here so he can actually hear what Albertans are saying?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank Elder Betty for the work that she did on our curriculum. She was very collaborative. She had put forward many recommendations. I'm happy to say that all were implemented and taken into account when we developed the curriculum. In fact, over the 12 days that she was involved in developing curriculum, she billed our government for \$5,000. During this work she made several recommendations to improve the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit curriculum, and all – again I repeat: all – of her recommendations were implemented in the draft that we have today. Of course, there's always room for improvement, and we look forward to hearing more from her.

Jobs Now Program

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, five days have passed since the Alberta government missed the deadline to deliver a plan to spend \$148 million in federal money meant for an Alberta jobs program. The only thing this government has done so far is give their nonexistent program a name. They ironically called their missing program jobs now, but it would have been better called jobs maybe or probably jobs never. Albertan workers are in a jobs emergency right now. They need help from this government, and the UCP has failed to deliver yet again. Premier, why is the UCP government so disorganized that it can't even spend federal money that would help create jobs for Albertans who need them?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our minister of labour is continuing to work with the federal government as well as with the Minister of Finance to ensure that we continue to provide the programming necessary to get our economic recovery going. We're proud to make sure that in this last budget we have allocated dollars for our jobs now program. We're going to continue to be there to support workers that want to get retraining as well as employers that want to hire Albertans and provide them with the necessary training to get back into the workplace.

Ms Gray: The minister of labour, the Minister of Finance, the Premier have all promised that we will see an announcement soon, yet Albertans are waiting for jobs. This government ran on the promise of jobs but lost more than 50,000 of them before the pandemic and many more since, and we currently have the second-highest unemployment rate in Canada. It's very clear from Alberta's economic recovery analysis that we are going to lag behind most other provinces coming out of the pandemic. When will the Premier start delivering on the jobs promises made to Albertans, and why has the government let \$148 million of jobs money potentially expire?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health to answer.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll remind the House and this room that the difficulty for the last couple of months has been that we didn't receive as a province, nor any province, the vaccinations that we were promised by the federal government, which has meant that we've had a difficult time, as all provinces had, being able to get the vaccinations in the arms of Albertans so that we can continue our relaunch of our economies across the country. It's unfortunate, but we have made a promise to Albertans that we'll get vaccines in the arms of Albertans as quickly as we receive those vaccines. The trouble is that we just have not received the vaccinations in Q1 that we were promised.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, that had absolutely no relationship to the question that I'm asking.

The federal government made \$185 million available. The federal government said: use your existing networks, your existing strong job training; get this money out and working for Albertans. This government had months to spend it. They were encouraged to get the money out the door, and instead they trumpeted this program in their no-jobs and no-plan budget. Now the federal deadline has passed, and there really are no jobs and no plan. To the Finance minister: can you explain to workers why the government has stalled? Why have you not created the program?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I want to say that Budget 2021 was about economic recovery: firstly, resourcing health to deal with the pandemic; a second priority, positioning the province for economic recovery and growth; and the third priority was to ensure that this government delivers government services most efficiently, something the members opposite didn't do one day while they governed. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East is the one with the call.

Citizen Initiative Act

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Citizen Initiative Act is a piece of legislation that would allow Albertans to petition for changes in policy. This would enable Albertans to gather support for referendums on important issues and give them a way to voice their concerns and enact changes. To the Minister of Justice: can you explain to Albertans what the Citizen Initiative Act entails and what opportunity it provides for them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the opportunity to speak on the Citizen Initiative Act. Citizen initiatives are a form of direct democracy, just like the referendum we have seen in Calgary on the Olympics or the United Kingdom's Brexit vote. But like all those votes, citizens' initiatives are votes on matters determined by the citizens, not the government. As the title of this legislation suggests, Albertans would have the opportunity to place matters directly onto the political agenda by collecting signatures from supportive individuals to initiate a vote.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the Citizen Initiative Act provides Albertans with the

tools they need to bring change and given that what has been proposed is a multistep process and given that sometimes referendums are necessary and vital to the democratic process, to the same minister: how can you assure Albertans that this process will be transparent and that their voices will be heard?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most important things we have done is to establish a legislative committee to review any initiatives before Albertans vote on them. This committee is a critical piece of the process to bring citizen initiatives into law. Should the committee not support the initiative, then the public would get an opportunity to vote on the initiative. Furthermore, the Chief Electoral Officer will verify signatures to determine if the petition was a successful one. These are features that ensure the integrity of the citizen initiative process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that referendums are serious matters and should be taken seriously as ways to effect change and given that with this legislation there's a potential for people to fraudulently gather signatures in order to promote policies that may not be in the best interest of all Albertans, to the same minister: what protections are in place to ensure that the system will not be abused?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Safeguarding democracy must be at the heart of everything we do as democratically elected officials. For that reason, when signatures are collected, the Chief Electoral Officer will be responsible for verifying every single signature. The Chief Electoral Officer is a disinterested, independent third party that has proven itself time and time again to be fully capable of verifying and authenticating our democratic process. Recall and citizen initiative legislation deliver substantial democratic reforms for all Albertans.

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

Health Minister

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer Alberta's physicians made it clear where they stand with the Minister of Health when they overwhelmingly voted to express a lack of confidence in him. Last week they once again made their voices clear when they voted down a new master agreement with this government. Now, the Premier then stated three times that he has one hundred per cent confidence in this minister, but it's clear that he is the only one that does. At what point will the Premier finally put the best interests of Albertans before his ego and that of this minister and replace him?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a past year that has been extraordinarily difficult for our front lines, including physicians, as they help to protect patients from COVID-19. Albertans across the province are grateful to physicians, who along with other health care workers have made great personal sacrifices to keep us safe. We're disappointed that the deal was narrowly rejected, but we will absolutely be sitting down in the near future with the staff and president of the AMA to continue with the

momentum that we have built up going into the drafting of the agreement.

2:10

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that this Health minister indeed chose to wage his war on doctors in the midst of a global pandemic and given that he demonstrated his lack of respect for physicians by calling them at home at night or berating them in their driveways and given that rather than own up to what is, frankly, childish behaviour, he attempted to gaslight Albertans by claiming that no fight with doctors had happened – you know, it's clear that the minister engaged in a deliberate attempt to rewrite history – can the Premier explain to every doctor in the province why he still stands behind him after the disrespect and disregard he's shown to physicians?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, this is the behaviour of the NDP – we've seen this for the last year, especially from this member – continuing to try to perpetuate false narratives about this government, about me, about my family. He will continue to behave that way. He will continue to try to undermine the confidence that people have in our public health system as we continue to reply to the pandemic. Look, we're focused on protecting lives; he can be focused on his childish behaviour.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that any health care worker will tell you that it has been this minister who has been undermining our public health care system and indeed given that doctors made that one hundred per cent clear in voting no on this master agreement and given that the failure to secure a deal with doctors may indeed now cause serious challenges to locking in agreements with other essential worker groups and given that I can't find a single doctor or health care worker for that matter who's willing to vouch for this minister, this Premier, or this government on health care, I have to ask the Premier – I suppose the Health minister may be the only person in this province with a lower approval rating than him; perhaps that's why he keeps him in cabinet.

Mr. Shandro: Again, Mr. Speaker, that's the behaviour of this member. I mean, making false narratives about me calling doctors in the middle of the night: that is his childish behaviour. He will continue to behave this way. We are focused on making sure that the health care system in this province is resourced the way it needs to be. We will continue to focus on lives. We will continue to focus on the pandemic. He can continue to behave in that way and continue to act childishly, but we will continue to focus on the pandemic.

COVID-19 Cases in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, cases of COVID are skyrocketing in Lethbridge, so 10 days ago I called on the government to take action, and it's been 10 days of silence. The people of Lethbridge want daily briefings from the south zone medical directors and daily reporting of R-values in the south zone, expansion of COVID care teams, and more support to local business. To the Minister of Health. He's had 10 days, but taken no public action, zero, zilch. Why is the minister ignoring Lethbridge and not taking the third wave seriously?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not true. We continue to provide support to those who are in Lethbridge. We continue to make sure that the medical officers of health in the south zone have

the resources that they need to be able to respond to the pandemic on the ground. We will continue to make sure that we're following the evidence. We have an announcement, as I said, later on this afternoon, and I look forward to being able to join Dr. Hinshaw this afternoon for that announcement.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the city of Lethbridge has the highest rate of active cases amongst the province's major cities and given that the Premier told Albertans this past Thursday that he has projections that the number of people in hospital is going to skyrocket, will the Minister of Health tell the people of Lethbridge how many people he's been told are projected to be sick with COVID in Lethbridge? Or is he hiding that information in the same way he's hiding the plan to respond to COVID and keep us safe?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, this is the behaviour of the NDP, continuing to try to undermine confidence in the health care system during the pandemic, continuing to politicize COVID. It's unfortunate behaviour. They can continue to behave that way. That's up to them. We will be focused on responding to the pandemic, making sure that the health care system has the resources that it needs, and continuing to follow the evidence and make sure that our restrictions are considering the cases that we have in the province. As the member noted, yes, we know the hospitalizations two weeks after cases; we will be able to project those hospitalizations.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that 10 days ago, Mr. Speaker, I released a substantive plan of specific actions that the minister could just say yes to and given that the minister has decided that Edmonton and Calgary are worthy of COVID care teams but so far he's refused to send them to Lethbridge, to the minister. A year into this pandemic the minister needs to answer why we don't have those COVID care teams, or his other option is, if he can't provide that answer, to just resign.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of government relations.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and whatever other things. I'm happy to tell the hon. member that the government has decided that COVID care teams will be available across Alberta, and obviously that includes Lethbridge. So, yes, if the hon. member has people that she needs to draw to our attention that need their care, she should let us know, but they will be out looking for them anyways. The COVID care teams, of course, were community-based groups that started in Calgary and Edmonton. It was such a good idea that we decided to spread it across the province. The hon. member, I hope, will feel good about that.

The Speaker: My apologies to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park is next.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tech investment in this province is on the rise with a significant announcement coming out of Calgary. Infosys is increasing their Calgary workforce from seven to 500 employees over the next two years, with a potential to create 2,000 more jobs in the years that follow. This is obviously very good news for our province, and I would definitely like to see more tech investment in the future. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: why are we now seeing such a large increase in tech investment in our province?

Mr. Schweitzer: To that member. They rightly note the immense amount of momentum in the technology space here in Alberta. Just from a recent report from the Canadian venture capital association, in 2018 about \$100 million was invested in venture capital in Alberta. In 2019 that increased to \$220 million, and just in 2020 that increased to \$455 million. That is a huge record for the province of Alberta. Alberta doubled in 2020, when the rest of Canada went down 30 per cent. This is huge for job creation here in Alberta. This money goes towards creating jobs in our province, helps us diversify our economy, Mr. Speaker. We're looking forward to more positive news in this space in the years to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that Infosys is not the only tech company recently to invest in this province and given that other companies such as Vancouver-based company mCloud, which is moving its head office to Calgary, and Jobber, which is planning on doubling its staff in Edmonton, are also taking advantage of what our province has to offer, to the same minister: why is all this investment so significant, and what is the overall benefit to these communities as a result?

Mr. Schweitzer: Well, Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is thousands of jobs, which also helps us diversify our economy here in Alberta. We asked the Innovation Capital Working Group for advice last year on: how do we accelerate the growth in this space in Alberta? Two big recommendations that they had: one was to put in place the innovation employment grant, which furthers research and development here in Alberta, and the other piece was to make sure that we have more dollars going into venture capital, so we put \$175 million into the Crown corporation the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. Those are smart policies. We're listening to the advice of experts, and we're encouraged by the development of our tech sector here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister. Given that this tech investment is clearly very important to the growth of our economy provincially and given that this also marks Alberta as a competitive business partner globally in the tech market and given that these tech investments clearly benefit the local communities both directly and indirectly, to the same minister: what is our government doing to continue to attract and maintain all this investment and growth from the tech industry?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, Alberta doesn't want to just be a player in the tech space. We want to become a dominant player in Canada in the tech space. That's why Alberta Innovates just recently launched a request for proposals with respect to establishing or furthering accelerators here in Alberta. That provides mentorship to these fast growing start-up companies that go from a handful of employees one year to hundreds of employees within a handful of months. We want to see them be successful. That's why we're investing in that exact area.

COVID-19 Outbreaks at Meat-processing Facilities

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, on April 18 the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry held a town hall with workers from Cargill who were concerned about the safety of their workplace where the minister reassured the workers that their work site was safe. Only it wasn't. Shortly before that telephone town hall the minister was briefed by

officials that two workers with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency had contracted COVID-19 from the Cargill plant. Two days after this town hall the plant was idled and went on to become the largest outbreak in North America. To the minister: why did you withhold this vital, life-saving information from the workers at Cargill?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, there again is the NDP playing political games with the pandemic, an unprecedented situation that our province and the world is facing. Our minister of agriculture is doing a great job leading an industry that is holding our province together, that is having one of the most successful years last year and this year that it has had in the history of our province. He's going to keep doing that at the same time as working with the rest of cabinet and the Health minister to manage the pandemic. Albertans can rest assured that we're not going to play NDP games.

2:20

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the minister, while withholding life-saving information from the Cargill workers, told them that everything that needs to be done both to keep people safe and the food supply maintained is being done and given that nearly half the workforce at the plant inevitably tested positive for COVID-19 and three people actually died as a result of the outbreak at the plant, to the minister: did the government hold back critical information from workers so that they wouldn't refuse unsafe work as was their right?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, our deepest sympathies go out to the families of anybody who has lost their life as a result of COVID-19. It's why our Health minister and our Premier and our government continue to fight each and every day to help manage the province through that pandemic. Again, we won't be playing the politics that the NDP play. Albertans want us to get our province back on track, continue to manage our way through the pandemic, and set up Alberta for success, not play petty partisan games that the NDP keep doing. Again, we're going to be focused on getting going. We're proud of the minister of agriculture and the great work he's doing with the agricultural industry inside our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has sought to cover for his minister and the failure of this government by blaming the workers of Cargill for the spread of COVID-19 in the plant and the surrounding community but given that the minister of agriculture actually knew that this facility was not safe and that COVID-19 was being transmitted in the tight working quarters within the plant and given that the government has lost all trust and credibility when it comes to keeping workers at Cargill and those across the province safe from COVID-19, will the government stand and commit to a full public inquiry into the outbreak at Cargill and the other plants so that we can ensure that justice is served for the families who lost their loved ones?

Mr. Shandro: That's not true at all. I would remind the member and the House again, Mr. Speaker, that we were the first province to begin a review of our response to the pandemic so we could continue to learn and build on the pandemic response plan that was last amended in 2014. We'll be making that report, that review public, and we will continue to learn from the response. We will continue to be able to – we started, actually, a review of continuing care back in 2019, which we'll also be able to learn from, the continuing care situation during COVID.

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, businesses are already being affected by the third wave. James, owner of Pazzo Pazzo restaurant, stated that because of the increased case counts and threat of the variants, he's seen a 70 per cent revenue drop, and the new grant of 15 per cent of one month's revenue will do little to help him survive. James is not alone in his criticism of this government's support. Even before the current spike in cases, CFIB said that the government's new program will be utterly insufficient. To the minister: small businesses continue to hang on by a thread, and with the third wave affecting revenues, is this government going to step up and provide any form of support that will actually help?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this government will continue to be there to support small businesses and medium-sized businesses across Alberta throughout this pandemic. Our relaunch grant was one of the most successful business support programs done by any province in this country. Over 70,000 businesses have taken part in that. Almost \$600 million has been dedicated to this program.

There's going to be an announcement later this afternoon on health parameters. We're going to continue to be there to provide supports to businesses. Look for further expanded resources coming to businesses here soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview with no preamble.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the government ended the successful program, then, which makes no sense, and given that there are certain businesses that have been hit harder during the pandemic – hotels, music venues, gyms, and theatres – and given that with the increase in cases and threat of a third wave most businesses can already see the writing on the wall, either lowered consumer confidence or public health orders – they'll be struggling for many more months – and given that this minister foolishly stated that he's ruled out any sector-specific support, meaning that the hardest hit businesses have to compete with everybody else for the same piece of the pie, to the minister: does your government still not have any plans to support the worst hit businesses?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, maybe the members opposite should deviate from their notes because the answer before said yes. We're going to be there to support small businesses across Alberta. We in Alberta have the best designed program in the entire country when it comes to supporting small businesses. The turnaround time on average is 10 days. We'd put that number up against any province in the country. Six hundred million dollars of support already out the door. Mr. Speaker, it's sad to lecture somebody who's been in this House for six years as to what fiscal year-ends are. Our fiscal year-end was the end of March. We're in April now. We're going to continue to have supports for small businesses in Alberta.

Mr. Bilous: Given that this government reports \$125 million in unspent funding that was supposed to help struggling businesses keep their doors open and Albertans employed but you failed – you failed – to get the money from the federal government, given that the Premier himself stated that provided supports are not enough – quote: it's true that not all supports are going to be enough to help all of them survive – which means that this government is aware and okay with businesses closing their doors forever, to the minister: why is this government wilfully not providing enough support to keep small businesses afloat? The original money promised to Alberta small businesses still hasn't been spent.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite does not understand programs provided by different ministries. We're talking about the relaunch grant here. Almost \$600 million has been dedicated to this. Those applications just closed March 31. Those funds are going to continue to flow. Average turnaround time: 10 days. It's sad that a member that has been in this House for six years, that used to be a cabinet minister does not understand basic programs of government. We'll continue to be there for small businesses. We have been from the beginning of this pandemic. We'll continue to be there all the way through.

The Speaker: The Member for Peace River has a question.

Educational Curriculum Redesign (continued)

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education is foundational to our society because it informs the beliefs, values, and views of Albertans and our children. Unfortunately, woke educational fads have become increasingly common, focusing on these fads instead of on educational knowledge and important skills. To the Minister of Education: how will the new curriculum incorporate skills, competencies, and key knowledge to set future generations of Albertans up for success?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Parents have been very clear that they expect Alberta's education system to provide their children with a strong foundation of essential skills and knowledge. The draft K to 6 curriculum equips students with foundational reading, writing, and math skills, which parents have told us are vital to ensuring their children's future success. This curriculum moves away from experimental teaching methods and provides clear, specific details about the knowledge and foundational skills that all elementary students must learn in each subject and grade. I'm so pleased that Albertans are reviewing and discussing the draft curriculum. We appreciate their feedback.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in the face of heckles from members opposite, from Edmonton-Glenora and others, Albertans and Canadians still face record levels of debt, particularly credit card, mortgage, vehicle payment debt, given that many people overburden themselves with these payments and given that a good understanding in financial literacy is intrinsic to a bright future for Albertans, can the minister please answer how this curriculum that you developed in consultation with Albertans and experts focuses on financial literacy, not some ideology based on the belief that everything in life is free?

Member LaGrange: I couldn't agree more. The new curriculum equips students with foundational reading, writing, and math skills while introducing substantive studies on Albertan, Canadian, and world history. We are preparing students for success by focusing on literacy, numeracy, practical skills, and citizenship. The curriculum will also have an increased focus on the development of work ethic, civic participation and citizenship, financial literacy, digital training, public speaking, critical thinking, and respect for different views. The new curriculum delivers on our commitment to Albertans to restore excellence in education.

Mr. Williams: Thank you to the minister through the Speaker. Given that education takes place at such an important time in our

children's development and given that so many academics and so-called experts use education as a chemistry set to test new educational theories developed in a laboratory, completely detached from reality of life outside, and given that these woke pedagogical fads have proven to be ineffective at teaching and retaining knowledge that kids need for success and given that the minister is here, can she please explain how this curriculum will take fads out of the classroom and stick to proven, sound teaching approaches and content with knowledge that will lead to the best outcomes for Albertans?

The Speaker: The minister . . . [interjections] Order. The Minister of Education has the call.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the draft K to 6 curriculum moves away from experimental teaching methods and provides clear, specific details about the knowledge and foundational skills that all elementary students must learn in each subject and grade and that both parents and teachers can read and understand. Thanks to the ministerial order on student learning signed in August, teachers will no longer be required to teach math using discovery or inquiry methods.

The new draft K to 6 curriculum removes the requirements that force teachers to use a particular method of teaching. We are seeing a decline in our international education rankings over the past number of years. We need to get back.

2:30 Coal Development Policy Consultation

Mr. Schmidt: Albertans got a good look at the commitment that this government has to consultation when the Minister of Energy lifted the 1976 Lougheed coal policy on the Friday before a long weekend without letting a single Albertan know. Now, in response to widespread public outrage the minister backtracked a bit and launched a panel and a vague online survey that contains only leading questions. When will the minister look Albertans in the eyes and explain why she believes that she needs to tear down the Rocky Mountains to mine coal?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy has made it clear that tearing down the mountains and mountaintop-removal mining is illegal in this province despite the fact that that member continues to perpetuate the NDP making things up inside this Chamber. Let me be clear. The NDP, they want to talk about consultation. That member was part of a government that sent out letters to the coal industry that allowed them to be able to apply for mines on category 2 land inside this province. As the Minister of Energy has said, she's looking forward to hearing from them at her panel, which is true consultation, and Albertans would like to hear whether that position has changed for the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that even if I wanted to, I couldn't because their survey is so loaded and given that most Albertans, including myself, expect online meetings and the opportunity to talk about the perils of tearing up the Rocky Mountains with the minister and maybe even the Premier and given that now the minister is appearing to be in hiding and given that the minister said that water quality and protection won't even be included in the terms of reference at the consultation, to the minister: isn't protecting our water from the dangers of coal mining a priority? If the minister is going to do a pretend consultation, shouldn't she at least pretend to care about water quality?

The Speaker: I would encourage the member to not make an accusation about the Minister of Energy and just perhaps rephrase the question in a way that's more parliamentary.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Energy minister has put together a panel of world-class individuals to work on this important issue with Albertans, and one of the things that she will be addressing through that process is that the former NDP government sent out letters approving mines on some of the most protected landscapes inside of this province. When it comes to water, water is already protected within our province under things like the Water Act, which have come along significantly after the 1976 coal policy and are significantly stricter, and unless the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is asking us to take our water policy and put it all the way back 50 years, I think we'll continue to work with the Alberta Water Act, which is one of the strictest in the world.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given the minister is monkeying with the Oldman water allocation order – so I'm sure that he has some strong opinions on the Water Act – and given that tomorrow Alberta's Official Opposition will propose a bill to ban coal mining in our eastern slopes until an enhanced regional plan is put in place to protect water in beautiful, natural spaces and given that we're putting this bill forward following consultations and submissions from the thousands upon thousands of Albertans who were clear that they don't want strip mining in the Rocky Mountains, can the minister explain why we managed to consult with Albertans and make changes to prevent damages to coal mines while she can't?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is the NDP making things up again. There have been no changes to the water allocations associated with coal. That is completely and utterly false. Let me be clear on that: no changes to water allocation. There were some proposals to increase allocations for environmental purposes to protect fish. I don't know if the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is now against fish and protecting habitat, but this government is focused on conservation and will continue to be. We support the Minister of Energy's consultation with her panel, a sharp contrast from that member and their former government, who never consulted Albertans on anything.

Child Care Affordability

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, last week this government cancelled the \$25-per-day child care pilot program, leaving thousands of families and child care operators stranded. Concerned parents and board members stood with me, begging this government to reconsider their decision. Ryan Way, who is a father and sits on the board of Building Blocks daycare in Grande Prairie, said that the pilot provided much-needed funding that allowed them to pay and keep staff, buy supplies, and keep their centre functioning. To the Minister of Children's Services: what does the government have to say to operators who are now laying off staff and losing families who can no longer afford child care because of the end of this program?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, this was a three-year pilot program implemented by the previous government, that did not benefit as many children and families as it should have. We respect parent choice, and the data is telling us that 1 out of 7 parents choose licensed child care in Alberta. The minister is making long-term and substantive changes to the system to ensure that high-quality child care is available and affordable, and in fact some low-income families are now paying as little as \$13 per day in the centre of their choosing.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. Given that low-income families paid zero dollars per day under the \$25-per-day program and that it served 7,500 children and created 1,740 new child care spaces across Alberta and given that this pilot was received so positively by families, operators, and third-party evaluators and given that a new study from the CCPA stated that high child care fees are linked to low enrolment, to the minister: what is the government's plan for the child care operators who now have to lay off staff and turn children away? Isn't this government supposed to be creating jobs, not eliminating them? Where are the jobs and economy now for the child care sector and working parents?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, the minister is making long-term and substantive changes to the system to ensure that high-quality child care is available and affordable. Through an agreement with the federal government we have enhanced our child care subsidy model so that about 1,600 lower income families pay the equivalent of \$25 per day or less in child care fees, and these additional spaces should also translate to additional jobs.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the minister heard directly from child care operators in a UCP town hall last week that they are turning away families because these families can't afford it and given that in an interview last week Brad West from the Glengarry Child Care Centre said that the minister is, quote, causing so much damage to the sector that with another two years under her leadership I don't think we'll ever be able to recover from what she's doing, to the minister. Those who actually work in child care believe that the policies being put forward by your government will ruin it for good. Will your government stop the damage right now and reinstate and expand the \$25-per-day child care program?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that the Minister of Children's Services is listening to parents and to service providers across the province. In conjunction with the federal government more inclusive child care spaces have been introduced, and that will, in turn, result in more jobs. In November 2020 the changes that were introduced reduced child care fees for more than 21,000 children.

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

Provincial Police Force Feasibility Study

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Law enforcement plays an important role in our society. The women and men from the RCMP and other police services risk their lives every day to protect their communities while providing essential services so that our families can live and play without fear. As an MLA for a riding that is protected by the RCMP, can the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General please explain the process that the government is taking in the consideration of a provincial police force?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain for that very important question. As the member knows, the government retained PricewaterhouseCoopers to, you know, conduct a feasibility study, what we call the provincial

police transition study, to determine whether or not it is feasible at this point in time for the province to embark on their own provincial police. We are expecting that particular report, and once we have the report, obviously, we will share that particular report with the people of Alberta.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the union representing RCMP officers has started a campaign in opposition to Alberta adopting a provincial police force and given that the campaign warns of higher costs for fewer services and that the transition may result in fewer police officers, which would be worrying for many Albertans, including the residents of Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, can the same minister please respond to these concerns and let us know how a provincial police force would rectify these problems?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While it is true that there are special interests out there who are already campaigning against the idea of a feasibility study with respect to the provincial police transition study, at the end of the day, you know, this study is all about making sure that we come up with a model of community policing in the 21st century. We are going to make sure that the factors and the realities on the ground dictate how we proceed going forward, not on the basis of those with special interests who are already campaigning against the idea of a study.

2:40

Mr. Turton: Thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that Albertans' opinions on policing may vary in communities served by the RCMP compared to those served by municipal police forces such as Edmonton and Calgary and given that a majority of the province's population lives in cities that are not protected by the RCMP, to the same minister: can he please outline next steps once the report is received?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member, once again. This transition study will provide Alberta's government with an evidence-based and objective assessment of the factors associated with establishing an Alberta provincial police to assist cabinet to consider the Fair Deal Panel's recommendation. After reviewing the PricewaterhouseCoopers findings, the Alberta government will make a decision about whether to continue studying the feasibility of establishing a provincial police. If cabinet decides to proceed, I can assure that there will be more analysis, that the government of Alberta will continue to consult with key stakeholders.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to Members' Statements.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen with a member's statement.

Humboldt Broncos Bus Crash Anniversary

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been three years since the tragic accident that claimed the lives of 16 promising individuals, physically injured 13 more, and impacted hockey fans around the globe. For the survivors, friends, and family of the Humboldt Broncos the emotional pain that they feel as well as the scars from their physical injuries may never fully heal. The impact of the crash near Armley, Saskatchewan, rippled through every community across Canada. Despite cheering for different teams, we were all Broncos on that day. While many of us didn't have the honour of knowing those involved, we all know someone who could have easily been in that scenario. Many have watched their children, friends, and loved ones board a bus for a sports trip or have even been a part of one of those groups themselves. Because of our shared experiences and love for the game of hockey, this tragedy hit home in a profound way.

While we remember those affected by this catastrophic accident, the stories of perseverance from survivors, the generosity of everyone who gave generously, and the empathy shown by a nation inspire us all and lives on. Many still have their sticks out for Humboldt on their front porches. Stories of persistence and determination emerging from the crash continue to provide a source of inspiration for fans. People like Ryan Straschnitzki, who continues to share his story of recovery and motivates us all, especially those working on their own physical injuries, by returning to the ice through sledge hockey.

I know that many of those who have lost family and friends in the accident often wonder if they are the last ones who will remember, but the city of Humboldt and the team have announced plans to make sure that the memory lives on by building a state-of-the-art tribute centre to honour those lives. A fundraising campaign has begun to raise \$25 million for a gallery, ice surface, physiotherapy centre that will continue to aid in the healing process, with several businesses and individuals already committing to help.

Mr. Speaker, I hope and pray that survivors, families, and friends can be encouraged that I and many others honour the memory of those that we lost and support them as they continue to grieve. May all those who are affected feel our support today and every day as we remain Humboldt strong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has a statement to make.

Indigenous Content in Educational Curriculum

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were disappointed when the UCP used their first act to kill the indigenous climate leadership initiative, were concerned when the government defunded the '60s scoop society, were annoyed when they gutted the urban indigenous programming, and were angry when the UCP government introduced a bill to alter the Metis Settlements Act without consulting the Métis people. After learning about the draft curriculum, Albertans are disappointed, concerned, annoyed, and angry again.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The truth and reconciliation call to action 62 asks that the government "make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary

contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.” This is what the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations chiefs had to say about the curriculum:

What was anticipated to be an opportunity to tell future generations of Albertans about the fulsome and diverse history of this province, including the histories of Treaty First Nations that have existed here since time immemorial, has instead devolved into a Eurocentric, American-focused, Christian-dominant narrative that perpetuates rather than addresses systemic racism.

And here are the comments of the Métis Nation of Alberta:

The draft curriculum was disheartening to say the least and a shock to our citizens who saw their input and collaboration reduced to nothing more than a “side-note” mention of the Métis while the tone of your message carried a Eurocentric-American point of view, effectively eliminating the voice and history of the Métis Nation in Alberta.

Dr. Pam Roach notes that the curriculum has “continual reference to indigenous people in the past tense. ‘Had different languages.’ ‘Had traditions and protocol for gifting.’” She replies: “Nice try at erasure here. But indigenous people [are] very much alive today.”

Premier, stop trying to erase indigenous people, stop the draft curriculum, and work with indigenous people to produce a fulsome and meaningful history and a robust accounting of contemporary lived experience.

Thank you.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. Schow: Last week Alberta’s government released their draft curriculum for K to 6 here in Alberta. This fulfills a campaign promise we made to Albertans in the last election. We committed to end the focus on so-called discovery learning, scrap the NDP’s secretive curriculum review, and replace it with a new curriculum based on input from teachers, parents, and subject matter experts. I’m proud to say that we have delivered on this commitment. Another promise made and a promise kept.

Alberta’s new curriculum is focused on teaching essential knowledge and skills. After years of declining student academic performance in literacy and math, the new curriculum will renew the importance of teaching foundational knowledge across all subjects to better prepare students for success. It has been almost 30 years since some of the subjects in K to 6 have been updated. The world has changed; so should our curriculum. Alberta’s new curriculum is founded on four key learning themes: literacy, numeracy, citizenship, and strong practical skills.

Studying mathematics can prepare students for jobs in computer science, construction, artificial intelligence, teaching, the restaurant industry, and many other fields. By leaving behind the focus on discovery math, students will use tried and true methods to learn foundational math skills, understand numbers and objects in order to solve problems confidently. Under the NDP students were not required to learn about money or develop financial literacy skills. With our new curriculum, students will learn a range of practical skills that will prepare them for success. This includes basic financial literacy, budget planning, and computer coding.

As a father I understand the importance of ensuring that our schools are preparing students for the real world, and that’s why I’m proud to support Alberta’s new curriculum. I’m confident that Alberta’s new K to 6 curriculum will once again put Alberta students at the very top and prepare every student in Cardston-Siksika and Alberta for a life of personal success.

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

Calgary LRT Green Line

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Exactly three weeks ago I stood in this House and called on the government to get to work building the green line. The deadline to start construction was quickly approaching, and this government needed to quit delaying if we were to get shovels in the ground this year. Unfortunately, that deadline has come and gone without any action from this government. Instead, the project continues to sit on the minister’s desk while Calgarians wait for the economic benefits of this project. The green line is critical to revitalizing Calgary’s downtown and getting Calgarians back to work. It will create 20,000 jobs and provide \$4.5 billion in stimulus spending at a time when it’s needed most. Calgary faces one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and all the major banks predict our province will have one of the slowest economic recoveries in the country.

Missing the construction deadline is a complete failure by the UCP. It fails to deliver on this government’s promises of jobs and economic growth, and worst of all, Mr. Speaker, it fails every single one of those 20,000 workers that would benefit from this project. Every day that passes without the construction start falls squarely at the feet of the UCP government because this is a choice. Instead of creating 20,000 jobs and building an economic recovery for the city, this government chose to give billions of dollars to profitable corporations, and they chose to appease the wealthy special interests trying to kill this project. Meanwhile they come up empty handed for critical projects that will improve the lives of Calgarians. Instead of ignoring Calgarians and taking them for granted, it’s time for our government to start investing in Calgary’s future.

Let’s get Calgarians back to work and build our economic recovery. Let’s build the green line.

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

Enhance Energy Carbon Capture Milestone

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to celebrate a true made-in-Alberta success story with a deep connection to my riding. A couple of weeks ago the Premier and the ministers of Energy and environment joined Enhance Energy officials to celebrate a million tonnes of carbon captured and sequestered in central Alberta.

2:50

Enhance Energy is sequestering CO₂ at a rate equivalent to taking over 325,000 cars per year off the road. Their business captures carbon from the Industrial Heartland of Alberta, ships it down the Alberta carbon trunk line to Clive, in my riding, where it is sequestered. The oil produced by this refinery is some of the lowest emission product on the planet. Alberta has the capacity to do much more with carbon capture and sequestration, and Enhance Energy, an Alberta company, is leading the way. I’m proud of the great work that Enhance is doing to reduce our carbon footprint while creating jobs. Enhance Energy has recently partnered with Nauticol Energy to also capture up to 1 million tonnes of CO₂ a year from Nauticol’s plant, a blue methanol facility.

Alberta’s government supports industry and projects like this to protect lives and livelihoods. That’s why our province has asked the federal government for a substantial commitment to this technology, supporting the great work of companies like Enhance. This is Alberta’s ingenuity at its finest, making our province, our country, and our world cleaner and safer, and it’s creating jobs for hard-working and entrepreneurial Albertans. The federal government trumpets fighting climate change and investing in green technology. Well, my hope is that the federal government will actually act and invest in this project and others like it.

Congratulations to the team at Enhance Energy, and my sincere compliments to them on their megatonne accomplishment. This is getting it done.

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

Glendale/Glendale Meadows Community Hall

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Calgary-Currie is a wonderfully diverse and inclusive community, one where families and neighbours come together. Mostly pre-COVID, of course, block parties happened, and for many areas it's the local community association hall that serves as the heart of the community. I know first-hand from volunteering for years on the Richmond Knob Hill Development Committee that it doesn't matter how you vote, what you look like, who you love, or how you live; everyone can come together at the community hall to serve the community, plan events, volunteer, and, of course, socialize. That is why it pains me to bring up the Glendale and Glendale Meadows community and what they have gone through.

On January 26 of this year the Glendale community hall experienced a catastrophic sewer backup that flooded the whole building. Perhaps worst of all, the newly restored preschool lost its home, and as a father of two I can only imagine the problems and stresses that that created for families in the community. I got the chance over the weekend to tour the structure, and it was heart-wrenching to see just how bad the damage is.

Along with, you know, dealing with insurance companies to help start the rebuild, the amazing volunteers are seeking grants from the province, the city of Calgary, and the federal government. One thing that struck me is that part-time volunteers have literally had to become full-time volunteers. The government of Alberta provides great supports like CFEP, the community facility enhancement program, and of course you can't have a balanced conversation about CFEP without including the community initiatives program, which, of course, supports the stabilize program.

I'll do everything I can to support these applications, and I encourage everyone in the community to get involved and help out however you can. For more information please go to www.myglendale.ca. There will also likely be a local fundraising drive to support and rebuild, and when that ramps up, you'll be sure to be able to see it on my Instagram and Facebook.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly, pursuant to Standing Order 7(8), that the daily Routine can extend past 3 o'clock.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park has a statement to make.

Clare's Law

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most horrific things that can occur in a relationship is domestic violence. Domestic violence is a family-shattering crime that affects many Canadians every year, especially now because during the COVID pandemic domestic violence rates have, unfortunately, been on the rise.

But Alberta's government has taken action by implementing a new law that will help prevent domestic violence before it can occur. On April 1 Clare's law came into effect. Clare's law allows

vulnerable Albertans who may be at risk of domestic violence to access relevant information about their romantic partners. This was one of our platform commitments, and our government is determined to provide support and protection for our vulnerable citizens.

The ministries of Justice and Solicitor General and Community and Social Services have worked closely with our police partners to make sure a timely, manageable, and thorough process is in place. This process ensures that we are striking the right balance between protecting those at risk, ensuring they are supported throughout the process, and considering the privacy of the person whose information is being disclosed.

Under the right-to-ask protocol any Albertan can apply for disclosure regarding their current or former intimate partner's potential risk for domestic violence. Additionally, someone can apply on behalf of someone else if they have their consent or without consent if they are a legal guardian or have legal authority of the person. I am confident that this legislation will save lives by helping to prevent domestic violence and protect those who are at risk.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 63, the Police (Street Checks and Carding) Amendment Act, 2021, sponsored by the Minister of Justice; Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, sponsored by myself; Bill 65, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, sponsored by the hon. the Minister of Health; and lastly, Bill 66, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2021, also sponsored by the hon. the Minister of Health.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I beg your indulgence. We'll go to the hon. Opposition House Leader, then the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 214, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who is the bill sponsor.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to listen to the concerns and voices of Albertans, educators, and experts and delay the pilot of their draft K to 6 curriculum until a broad consultation with staff, teachers, students, parents, curriculum experts, and all Albertans is completed given the significant negative public response to the draft curriculum.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings? Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek to table the requisite number of copies of 31 letters and e-mails sent by Albertans from across this province representing early childhood educators, child care operators, and parents who are requesting that this government maintain and expand the \$25-per-day child care program as it has been life changing and transformational for them.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Later, when we hear the urgency for SO 42, I intend to refer to a letter, so I'll table it today. It is from the Association of Alberta Deans of Education.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board 2021 annual report and the Hospital Privileges Appeal Board 2020 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Ms Pon, Minister of Seniors and Housing, supplemental response to a question raised by Ms Renaud, hon. Member for St. Albert, March 17, 2021, Ministry of Seniors and Housing 2021-22 main estimates debate.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will now hear the Standing Order 42. As I believe this is the initial opportunity for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to raise a Standing Order 42 and as noted in her tabling, this is an opportunity to briefly explain the urgency of unanimous consent being granted for SO 42, so I encourage you to stick to the urgency.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Ms Hoffman:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to listen to the concerns and voices of Albertans, educators, and experts and delay the pilot of the draft K to 6 curriculum until a broad consultation with staff, teachers, students, parents, curriculum experts, and all Albertans is completed given the significant negative public response to this draft curriculum.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to SO 42 and request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned as we debate the motion that has been now distributed. Specifically, the motion refers to the urgency of this.

Today is the first day the House has sat given that the draft curriculum was released during the legislative break, the constituency week, as it's referred to. This is urgent for the following reasons, Mr. Speaker. I would say that the sharp and significant uprise of feedback that we have received in just one week demonstrates that this is an urgent matter to the people of Alberta. They are calling on us to act quickly and to take decisive action.

3:00

Just earlier today I checked how many school authorities had opted out of this draft curriculum, and we were already at five school districts, Mr. Speaker, two of the five being among the largest districts in our province, number two and number four, in terms of staff and in terms of students. There is significant concern being raised by the people of Alberta. I imagine that all members have received this. I've received thousands of e-mails myself. I know the minister talked about a website to gather feedback. We also have a website gathering feedback, and the amount of original content – this isn't a letter-writing campaign that is a form letter. These are parents that have taken the time, primarily parents. Over the last year they've gotten to know the current curriculum that their children are learning exceptionally well, many through the remote home-learning process, and they have raised a number of significant concerns.

As well, Mr. Speaker, more than 30,000 people have joined the Albertans Reject Curriculum Draft Facebook group that was launched just one week ago. And now we're seeing a rush of boards

and other large organizations, including the francophone association, calling on the government to halt this curriculum. This has all happened just in the last week. This is the first sitting day.

Huge concerns have been raised specifically around grade 6 and grade 2 content. To put it quite simply, this is about the foundation of knowledge for all Alberta students. This is about making sure that what we prepare them for in K through 6 gives them a strong foundation for secondary education, grade 7 through 12, as well as for postsecondary education, the world of work, and for being engaged citizens in democracy.

The original curriculum process began under then Education Minister Dave Hancock, and this is something that was continued on until the current government decided to halt that process completely, metaphorically put it through the shredder, and launch a new curriculum. And the public response to that, Mr. Speaker, has been astounding.

When the Premier spoke of this matter late last week, he said that there was overwhelming support. I have seen the contrary through the correspondence that I've received, through people stopping me on the street, and I imagine many others members have as well.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. I'm having a difficult time connecting some of the public response to the urgency of the debate in the House. I encourage you to speak specifically to the urgency and not debate the content of the motion, which I think that we are certainly heading in the direction of.

Ms Hoffman: I appreciate your caution, Mr. Speaker.

While such a loud and rapid response is being received, this is absolutely the first sitting day that this Assembly is together since it was introduced. The large number of correspondence that we've received during that constituency week, I think, is a symbol to all members of this Assembly that this is a matter of concern for your constituents, for my constituents, for all Albertans. I think it would demonstrate that we indeed have our earplugs out, that we are listening to the people of Alberta, that we're not continuing to recite talking points that were written a week ago, and that we are receiving information and we're responding in a rapid way.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: I'm not sure if you're raising a point of order, but if that's the case, I'm happy to hear it.

Point of Order Speaking to Urgency

Mr. McIver: I am raising a point of order. While I appreciate that it's a long-standing tradition in this House, though not one that's accepted, to try to debate an item when one is supposed to be limited to talking to the reason for urgency, the member has now drifted once pretty far that way. You warned the member, and the member has drifted there again. I know that the member – we all try to sneak in debate when we're supposed to be talking urgency, but it might be time to ask the member to stick to the issue of urgency.

The Speaker: I'm not sure if the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has any further comments with respect to urgency, but I will interject if they aren't.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: I therefore request, given the significant volume, the amount of short time, and the fact that this is the first sitting day, that this is an urgent matter that Albertans have spoken very

publicly, very quickly about, and they expect their government and their Legislative Assembly representatives to respond also in an urgent matter and address this as promptly as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 42 this is a nondebatable request for unanimous consent which no other member can speak to.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: As such, we're at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 54

Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate March 24: Mr. Dreeshen]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has 12 minutes remaining to speak should he choose to use it.

Seeing not, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on second reading of Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021. You know, I want to be clear with all members of the House. We've had lots of conversations, and I've been consulting with many of our producers in southern Alberta. I recognize that this bill is important for two reasons. One is to ensure that the irrigation districts are able to have their plebiscites when they need to be able to develop their boards, but the more significant change and the reason for this bill is to support and allow the irrigation districts to take on an amount of debt so that they can take the loan from the CAP program with the federal government.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Now, we know that out of the \$850 million that is being put aside for irrigation, the majority of that \$850 million is actually coming from the federal government. It's coming from the federal government in the sense of a loan, not through a grant or any other type of ability to access it, so because of that, the irrigation districts need to then be able to take on that debt. Prior to this piece of legislation being introduced, that was not something that could happen.

It's pretty much a housekeeping bill, and I appreciate that that is what it is. There are some things that I think – had the minister decided to spend some more time on the piece of legislation, he could have addressed some of the other pieces that the irrigation districts are discussing. I have some concerns about the fact that the legislation is outdated and that, you know, there are pieces within the legislation as a whole that do create some barriers for the irrigation districts to do the work that they need to do. One of those barriers would be advertising and making sure that communities are aware that when maintenance to irrigation canals or expansion of those areas are being done, they notify the surrounding communities.

Right now the legislation only allows that to be done in writing. That made sense when the bill was written because, of course, that was when all small communities, all small towns had newspapers, and you could put it in the newspaper and the community read it. Now, as we've seen the world change, we have social media and online tools. Many of those small community papers no longer

exist, so the notification requirements around making sure that people are aware of what's happening have changed. I know the irrigation districts would like that reflected in the legislation, and I recognize that that wasn't done within this piece of legislation. I'm assuming and may believe that that's coming at some point, but I won't presuppose that the government is going to actually do that.

The other piece that I think is really important to look at with this is that we know that irrigation is a tool that is very important to southern Alberta. Without irrigation most of the crops would suffer because it's so hot and dry down there. That's why we're able to grow sugar beets and create sugar. That's why we're able to grow pulses and grains and potatoes and all of the great things that happen in Alberta.

Now, of course, with irrigation comes water because that is the main purpose of irrigation. I think that there are some legitimate concerns that have been brought up in regard to what is happening in southern Alberta, specifically when we look at if irrigation is going to be expanded and we're going to be supporting the agricultural industry to grow those wonderful products that they're growing and see, hopefully, diversification and expansion through other industries, like the potato area with Cavendish – hopefully, we'll see some pulse diversification – if at any point the water becomes contaminated, the irrigation canals and the irrigation system don't mean anything.

3:10

Now, I have heard and I think that I'd like to hear from the government that even with coal – and we've heard the minister say this a few times in regard to: oh, well, the water allocation hasn't changed; the Oldman River is not going to be impacted. That's what the minister says. But what I'm hearing from producers is actually that the water monitoring in itself has been impacted. In fact, if we look at the budget for both the ministry of environment as well as the ministry of agriculture, those positions, those staff that were doing water monitoring were actually terminated. Those positions no longer exist.

So the outcome of that water monitoring has actually been put on the irrigation districts, who are now having to pay to get their water monitored. Now I'm hearing other groups of our producers who are now also going to be paying to get their water monitored because they can't guarantee that the ministry will send someone out to test that water. They're now going to have to pay to have someone come out and test it and then send it to a private lab to get the certifications that they need, which is a problem. I believe that water is a common good. I believe that we want to make sure that we have good, clean water in this province.

We know that the irrigation canals are not just about growing produce. We also know that the irrigation canals are the main water provider for Lethbridge, for Medicine Hat, for surrounding communities that use the irrigation system to provide drinking water. To hear that there has been a move that now producers are going to have to get their water tested and do it themselves to ensure that the water is meeting the quality and the standards that are required by the Canadian food regulator: I think it's a problem. It should be a problem for all citizens because it's also their drinking water.

I would like to hear from the minister, whether it be the minister of environment, who is ultimately responsible for water – but, you know, the minister of agriculture could also stand up and comment on this. How are we ensuring that the water quality is being maintained, and where is that being done, and where is the record of the last test that was done on our water, especially from the Oldman River? Again, \$815 million can be put into an investment, which is only really, to be clear, \$274 million from the province –

the rest is a loan from the federal government – but if the irrigation water becomes contaminated, if we start seeing invasive species growing in the pipes or we start seeing that we have seepage happening from coal mine exploration, then there's a problem.

That's fine. You know, supporting a bill in the context of the housekeeping required to support the ability to take on debt and irrigation communities and districts to take on the debt for the CIB program, the Canada Infrastructure Bank, is fine, but there are a lot more questions that are related to irrigation that we haven't actually heard from this government. I think they're legitimate questions that Albertans are continuously bringing up around the quality of their water in southern Alberta. I'd like to hear that from the minister.

The other piece that I think is also important is that we've heard the minister stand up quite a few times, talking about how great the agricultural industry has been doing in Alberta. Thankfully, Red Deer-South has had a great year when it comes to agriculture. Grain, cereals, pulses: all of the commodities have definitely been able to carry us through the pandemic in the sense of generating some economic growth and giving some good return for the investment that farmers are putting in every day to grow these products.

But what we also haven't heard the minister recognize or even address is what's going on for Red Deer-North. We talk about irrigation and how important water is for producers in the south and this great announcement about, you know, expanding irrigation networks. We hear nothing about how we're going to support the farmers in northern Alberta.

What I can tell you is that every time the minister decides to make a comment about how great agriculture is doing in grain, I hear from northern Alberta farmers saying: "Well, my fields all failed last year. I got flooded out. There was too much moisture in the soil. There's still too much moisture in the soil. Everything was eroding, so we couldn't even seed, and if we did seed, well, it all eroded down the hill anyway." So my question is: is \$815 million – 60 per cent of that is from the feds and \$270 million from the province for irrigation canals and expansion of irrigation networks, yet nothing has been invested by this government into infrastructure for the north. Those farmers deserve support, too.

I would like to see the government come forward and talk about a plan and a vision that they have for northern Alberta farmers that includes some of this money or goes back to the feds and says: we need more for CIB, the Canadian Infrastructure Bank; we need them to invest some more and bring some more money to northern Alberta. We need to look at tiling, or we need to look at different strategies that work to help the water filter and run off these crops and these fields without contaminating the water in the north. It can happen. We see the research. Norway is doing it. They've got lots of options in Norway, because they have the same kind of issues with climate. We're watching right now to look at what's happening.

I've done a couple of farm tours in the last little bit, obviously COVID compliant. They're watching as well to see what their fields are going to look like in northern Alberta, because they don't know. There's still snow on many of them. But I can tell you that last year was a very, very hard year. To see this government talking about not supporting all of AgriStability, not to be looking at all of the different other options for farmers, and focusing solely on irrigation as being the big success story of this government and "Look what's happened; there's \$274 million being put into an irrigation plan," that really is only happening because the feds are putting in 60 per cent of it – I don't think it would happen if they didn't – and ignoring the rest of the province is pretty sad. I mean, from Red Deer-North, ignoring all of northern Alberta.

On top of that, looking at the fact that – I want to go back again to quality of water. If we don't have these certificates – for some reason the government is not testing the water; I don't know why that is. Those certificates are used for international sale. Many of our producers show that certificate to say: "Our water quality is so good in southern Alberta. We have the best products – we have the best potatoes, we have the best pulses, we have the best sugar beets – in southern Alberta because we have such amazing water quality." They get a little certificate with a stamp on it, and they get to show that to who they sell their products to. That's great for international trade and to celebrate the industry and to really support the work that's happening and in fact have investment come into the province because the quality of the product is so good, to diversify it here and to do all of those things. It's a great selling feature.

So my question, again, to the government would be: where's that certificate? Who's going to be providing that certificate? Typically it's a government of Alberta certificate, a water-is-great stamp. We now have different producer groups having to get their own water tested, and they're having to pay. This is the thing, right? The irrigation districts have to pay to get their own water tested, when that used to be done by the province, because the staff don't exist anymore. This is just another one of those examples where the downloading of cost is on the consumer and on Albertans, especially with our irrigation systems. Because it's the municipalities' drinking water, in Medicine Hat and in Lethbridge and all of these places there's a fee attached to that. Of course, that fee is going to get downloaded on the citizens of these cities and towns and counties because that's how they get their water. It's quite a substantial fee from what I understand. For one test it's in the tens of thousands of dollars. Of course, that's only one area, and, you know, there are other things.

3:20

The other part about the water testing, too, for these areas is that if it's not done by the province and a certificate is not provided, then for some reason – and this is an interesting red tape solution that I would love the government to take on. If the water is not tested in Alberta, then they'll just look at similar farming practices in another province, and they'll use that water. They'll say: well, if it's being farmed the same way in Ontario with the same outcome and the same product, and they're producing pulses there, we'll just take their water sample, and if their water sample is fine, then it's fine. But if there's a problem in Ontario with their water and we don't test our water here in Alberta, then all of a sudden the Alberta producers are having to respond to an issue in water that actually has nothing to do with Alberta. Because the water testing hasn't happened and there's no verification from the province, that is, for some reason, how it works.

The best practice would be that the government, the province, whether it be Environment and Parks and ideally agriculture, would test the water, and then we wouldn't have these issues. We've seen this in the ag industry. I'm sure many of the colleagues in here know this. When there was an issue with eggs in Ontario with salmonella, it impacted the Alberta market because then they had to go through extra testing for their eggs because they had to prove that they didn't have the salmonella issue that Ontario was having. Even though we're provinces and provinces and provinces apart, it's all part of the same supply chain.

Again, although this bill is fine and I don't think there's any reason why we wouldn't support it, it doesn't actually talk about any of the other issues that relate to agriculture and support farmers or relate to diversification of our industry or relate to water monitoring or to, you know, coal exploration in the south, the issues that farmers and ranchers are coming forward with around their

concerns around southern Alberta and the southern slopes. It doesn't address or look at investing any money into helping farmers in the north . . .

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

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. I see the hon. Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I'm enjoying very much the debates and commentary of the hon. member, under Standing Order 23(1), "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly," one of the practices and precedents that this offends is that people generally are required to speak somewhat about the bill that is being debated. While the member has wandered far and wide into, I would say, a litany and a grocery list of things that the hon. member might rather discuss, the hon. member's preferences are not my concern. My only concern is that you perhaps remind the hon. member to spend some time, at least, debating the bill which is before this House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I am prepared to rule, but I see the hon. Opposition House Leader has risen.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, on 23(1), in response to the remarks I was just listening to from my colleague from Edmonton-Manning, this is not a point of order. We are currently in second reading. The member is eloquently responding to the bill, the general subjects of the bill, and general subjects relating to it. That the Deputy Government House Leader finds that this offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly I completely disagree with. I think that this is in practice with how debate around a new piece of legislation takes place. It's my suggestion to you that this is not a point of order and that the member is being very relevant and on topic at this time.

The Acting Speaker: Based on the submissions I think that it is fair to say that this is not a point of order and that it is a matter of debate in the sense that often we have afforded a wide swath with regard to especially when individuals have a first opportunity to speak on a bill.

I would ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to please continue with about 3:45 left, should she choose to take it.

Debate Continued

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, I do appreciate that coal and water monitoring is a little bit of a sore point.

The reality of it is that it will significantly impact the irrigation districts, significantly; \$850 million is a lot of money to be putting forward to expand only eight, to be clear, of the 13 irrigation canals that are registered for this program. All of them are in southern Alberta. All of them somehow are interconnected to the Oldman River, which, then, is where the majority of Albertans are standing up. We're hearing from them very, very clearly that they're worried about coal exploration, they're worried about contamination of their water, they're worried about their drinking water, and all of that runs through our irrigation system. It's very much related to this bill because it relates to a huge financial investment by this province, that is not putting the safety measures in place to protect the very system. I mean, yep, that's coal.

We could talk about invasive species and the fact that, you know, we know that mussels are an issue in this province and getting into our fresh water. We've got our lovely canines that inspect our boats, and we're looking and trying to stop people from coming across the border and making sure that they're not using their boats where they're not supposed to, but invasive species are also an issue for the irrigation canal because if the mussels get into the system, they can basically clog up a pipe. That is very related to irrigation systems, and, again, that is also part of the monitoring system. To make sure that the minister of environment and the ministry in itself are ensuring that those invasive species are not getting into our freshwater system and potentially damaging and causing huge damage to the irrigation system is important.

Water is what irrigation is. The whole intention of the irrigation system is to ensure that we put water on our crops and that when we have really dry seasons, you know, our producers can continue to produce. I think I find it a little bit rich when the government says that water monitoring and making sure that we don't have issues around our southern slopes in Alberta and contamination of our water don't relate to this bill because I don't know what else they want to put through it unless the plan is to, you know, take over these pipes and put oil through them. I think the water part is pretty important, and the producers care about it. In fact, out of anything, that is what they're talking about. The investment is great, but it only works if the water is clean. I appreciate that it's a touchy subject, but the reality is that it is the subject.

Let's see. What other facts can I give you today? I think some of the important things that the hon. government members might want to also consider is that Alberta has more than 1.7 million irrigation acres that generate \$2.4 billion in annual labour income and support 56,000 jobs. That's a lot of people working in southern Alberta who may lose their jobs if the water becomes contaminated by coal. It will significantly impact the southern Alberta economy because \$2 billion in annual sales accounts for about 18 per cent of the total provincial food-processing sales. That's a lot. Irrigation contributes to \$3.6 billion in Alberta's gross domestic product.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express my support for Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021. I would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and all the staff for their hard work in developing this legislation. This bill will improve our irrigation industry, which is a vital part of Alberta's economy. It will also contribute to the transformation of the agriculture sector and immensely improve its efficiency.

Agriculture has a strong history in Alberta, and without it we would not be where we are today. Alberta's rural communities provided huge contributions in building our province, and their land work has benefited Albertans for over a hundred years. Many rural workers over the past century were, like myself, immigrants to Alberta, with years of experience working in agriculture. Their hard work made our province what it is today. Now, in the 21st century, our province enjoys the advantage of modern technology with roots almost literally in practices that began decades ago. Irrigation is one such practice that has been established in the agriculture industry for a very long time. The irrigation industry is a vital component of Alberta's agriculture sector, and it always has been. For well over a hundred years it has created tens of thousands of jobs and brought prosperity to Albertans. Today not only does it make up a significant portion of the agriculture and food industry but every year the irrigation industry also contributes \$3.6 billion to Alberta's

GDP. Mr. Speaker, this is a significant number, but there are even more ways this sector contributes to Alberta's economy.

3:30

Currently the irrigation industry is a promising place to invest for the future. Investors can expect a return of almost 300 per cent. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that this is due in large part to the organizational structures first ensured in the early 1900s. Since the 1915 Irrigation Districts Act was passed, landowners have taken the opportunity to organize themselves into districts, now a total of 13, to better represent their needs to the government through their own boards of directors. Having the ability to represent themselves and advocate for their own industry has allowed these irrigation districts more control over their own development. These districts continue to make significant contributions to our lives and livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, in recognition of the importance of this sector we wanted to ensure continued success in the irrigation industry. Last year the government announced the Alberta recovery plan, with a historic \$815 million investment in irrigation district infrastructure. This investment was due in part to government grants, a loan from the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and the combined investment of \$163 million from eight irrigation districts. These funds will serve to modernize the sector while at the same time increasing water storage capacity at the sites. It will also bring up to 8,080 jobs to Albertans directly and indirectly, many of them in the field of construction. However, in order to ensure that this funding is allocated to the districts, necessary changes have to be made to the Irrigation Districts Act, which have now been introduced by Bill 54.

Without this investment irrigation districts would have a much harder time planning large-scale projects. The bill will remove uncertainties in the act and introduce clarity that will allow Alberta's irrigation industry to borrow funds for large-scale projects that would see a major boost to Alberta's recovery. The amendments that the bill introduces are in accordance with the condition that was outlined by the Canada Infrastructure Bank, or CIB, prior to releasing the funding. The CIB required that the proper clarification must be made regarding commercial activities. Unless this change is made, CIB can terminate the credit agreement and cancel the loan, which represents 50 per cent of the total project. Bill 54 seeks to provide this explicit clarification that the term "commercial activities" does not apply to an irrigation district investing in its own irrigation works.

Moreover, if unchanged, these uncertainties have the potential to cause a number of problems and create a negative impact on investment in irrigation districts because the language is unclear regarding what was considered commercial activity in the act. This meant that investors were more hesitant to lend money to irrigation districts. That is why this is an important matter we need to address, Mr. Speaker. We need to make it easier and more feasible to invest in the agriculture industry.

This industry has always made up a vital portion of Alberta's economy, and it will continue to do so for generations to come. Having said that, it is that much more significant that we make investment in agriculture as simple and clear as possible. By clarifying this language, we will be providing every opportunity for expansion in the agriculture industry. Given the historic contributions of this industry to Alberta, it is only fitting that we make vital investments into irrigation districts and make improvements to the existing legislation. This is so important given our current economic situation and our need to recover from the economic downturn Alberta has faced. Inviting more investment to Alberta's agriculture is just one more way we can do that to continue to

protect the lives and livelihoods of Albertans, particularly those who are employed in the irrigation industry.

This bill will also address similar problems that some irrigation districts have pointed out in regard to improving the governance of their boards. Part of the democratic process involves guaranteeing accountability to decision-makers. This applies to all levels of governance. This particular example is significant because in the past some districts have expressed the need to limit the consecutive terms of the board members. Mr. Speaker, Bill 54 will provide the option to limit the terms of sitting board members, which in turn gives the chance for new board members to be part of the board and will allow Albertans the opportunity to bring exciting new ideas and proposals forward and give irrigation districts more chances to hear from people of diverse backgrounds. This is nothing new as these kinds of term limits are common across all kinds of board governance. Currently there is a low turnover rate in the irrigation districts boards. Increasing accountability through board term limits will give these districts more leeway and freedom with decision-making so that they won't be held back by stagnant ideas.

Mr. Speaker, we want to encourage new ideas and fresh perspectives. That is what this legislation does. It provides the chance for investment, funding, jobs, and accountability across the irrigation districts. It increases the confidence that investors can have in the industry. By increasing this confidence and clarifying the language in this legislation, we'll be opening up more opportunities for funding from our government. This funding will greatly increase the efficiency of this sector through projects designed to boost the industry. Our government expects that these projects will generate around \$430 million in our GDP every year.

Mr. Speaker, this will not come at a better time. Not only are we improving the irrigation districts through this funding by opening up investment opportunities, but we are also doing the same for our province. Our province needs this agriculture industry. Alberta was built through the hard work of farmers and rural workers. Now we have the opportunity to show our appreciation for this industry by introducing legislation that will improve its efficiency and productivity. That is why I fully support Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021, and I encourage all the members of this House to support this bill as well.

Let me again express my appreciation to the minister and all the staff of the ministry for making these changes possible towards a better future for Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for short questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 54, Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021. I've appreciated the comments that we've heard thus far in the debate. Thank you, in particular, to the Member for Edmonton-Manning for raising some of our main concerns here in the opposition when we look at this legislation. As was mentioned by that member, we do, as far as I can tell, plan to support Bill 54, but we do have concerns. When we look at what's included in this legislation, it's important to recognize that irrigation is no doubt an important industry, and supporting and investing in agriculture is necessary for supporting the diversification and the investments that we hope to see in Alberta. No doubt this sector has become even more important as we see the global price of oil falling and we look to other sectors to continue the important work of supporting our economy.

3:40

When we look at the idea of supporting agriculture through investments in irrigation districts and irrigation systems, no doubt it's something that I think we will see broad support for from all members in the Legislature as well as from the general public. But, once again, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning raised, on this piece of legislation there are questions that we don't have answers for at this point, so we hope to hear from the minister moving forward.

It's also important to address, once again, that when we look at the investments that are proposed through previous announcements and through the creation of this legislation, the majority of that funding is coming from the federal government, so we have to appreciate that in some respects it does seem like if it wasn't for the federal government, in this instance, supporting us through the Infrastructure Bank, we may not be seeing these investments in the first place. But I will point out that I am thankful to see these investments moving forward and thankful to see the federal government supporting Alberta through this process.

The fact is that when we look at other areas of partnership or opportunities for partnership between the province of Alberta and the federal government, unfortunately this UCP government has been slow to take up that support, specifically when we look at the critical worker benefit. The fact is that we were in here just two weeks ago laying out the fact that the provincial government had no real plan to administer this money and that because of that, it was very likely that federal dollars were going to be removed from the table. We have yet to see how exactly that is going to play out, but the fact is that this government had more than a year to come to an agreement with the federal government.

The lack of movement from the provincial government really went to show, in that instance, how little they at least appeared to care about ensuring that front-line workers across the province were getting that funding. But, once again, Mr. Speaker, thankfully in this instance we finally see this legislation moving forward and supports for the irrigation districts across the province. I believe it was relatively late or maybe mid-2020 when we saw some of these announcements being made, so to see it moving forward is an important step, I would say, in the right direction overall.

Once again, there are concerns that we have that aren't addressed through this legislation, and we will get to that. The Member for Edmonton-Manning spoke to some of those issues. They continue to be concerns for us, specifically with the environmental record of this UCP government and even looking back to some of the decisions that the ministries have made in terms of funding for their portfolios and funding for their ministries.

When we look at Agriculture and Forestry, the ministry has been completely devastated by cuts from this UCP government. When we think about the last budget and look at this budget, you know, it's hard to believe that this is a government that primarily is coming from rural communities, because it does not show through their priorities and their commitments to funding for important parts of our society and important parts of our industry. When we look at the funding cuts that happened in Agriculture and Forestry, it was disproportionately affected compared to other ministries, absolutely devastated, whether it was through research funding or jobs in the ministry or funding for colleges and universities across the province that focused on this important work, not only through that ministry but also when we look at the decision to make major cuts at Alberta Innovates.

In last year's budget we saw an \$89 million cut to Alberta Innovates. In this budget we saw a small piece of that money return to Alberta Innovates, but the fact is that when we look at the important work that Alberta Innovates is doing, whether it's

potentially some marketing, whether it's product research or value-added processing, moving those opportunities forward, they do invaluable work. It goes to show whether we are, once again, talking about value-added processing, whether we are talking about the expansion of pulse crops in our province and the opportunities that lie there, when we see major cuts to these important programs, it really contradicts the messaging of the UCP, and it really contradicts the message that we should be sending as a province to try and bring new people in, new investors, new corporations and companies to support our province.

You know, when we look at the cuts, whether it's to Alberta Innovates or some of the cuts that we saw last year to the Lethbridge research centre, for example, which is the district office for Alberta agriculture, and the Crop Diversification Centre South in Brooks, Alberta, last year – a short time ago we saw an undisclosed number of employees lose their jobs at that facility. They once again are focused on things like research, ensuring that, moving forward, the technologies are in place or that we're understanding what the future of the industry holds for our province and trying to stay ahead of any hurdles or circumstances that might be on the horizon.

When we see massive cuts to programs like that, in research or any other piece of the sector, it's very concerning. Articles were written about that, the job losses at that research facility, and it was very clear that with some of these research opportunities that were being undertaken and have now potentially been cut or lost – those are things that we won't necessarily see for several years, possibly a decade from now, the full extent of the damage that this government has caused by cutting positions at that research centre or in their ministry altogether.

Once again, while we're thankful to see the provincial government finally, you know, doing something positive in terms of a relationship with the federal government, the fact is that when we look at the decisions of the ministers and the cuts to their ministries, it's quite opposite from the story that they're telling to Albertans on how much they care about our rural communities and how much they care about investments in those communities, whether it's in agriculture, forestry, or any other sector.

Now, once again, when we look at the \$850 million proposed, moving forward we see the federal government taking on 60 per cent of that, the provincial government providing 40 per cent of that. Still we have the provincial government, you know, not even willing to commit the same level of support as our federal government. But at the end of the day this \$850 million investment is definitely important.

Now, as I alluded to earlier, there are concerns that we see in this legislation or concerns about what is missing within this legislation. The fact is that there were many requests for additional changes to this bill that are not included here. I believe that if a bit more time, potentially or more efficiently used for consultation – we may have seen some more suggestions from the industry actually implemented through this legislation, which is relatively unfortunate.

You know, once again, the Member for Edmonton-Manning and the critic on this important file raised several times our concerns around the contamination of our water from coal. Stakeholders have come forward in great numbers to raise their concerns around this, probably, in terms of how much feedback we're getting, one of the most important issues to communities especially who have water sources and irrigation that are going to be affected by the proposed coal facilities moving forward, which is greatly concerning. Once again, why are only eight out of 13 irrigation canals registered for this program? What happened to the rest of them? "Why aren't they included?" is a concern that was brought up by my colleague from Edmonton-Manning.

When we look at the policy changes that are being provided in here: two major policy changes. One, it provides an exemption to commercial activity in the act and, two, gives irrigation districts the power to create bylaws regarding term limits for directors. Now, the exemption to commercial activities is being added to the Irrigation Districts Act to provide clarity around how that money is going to roll out, and due to a lot of the restrictions regarding debt limits for irrigation districts, this change has to be made. We can understand that and appreciate that there are a lot of things that have to be done to move this money forward. We can appreciate that and support those decisions of the provincial government to move forward with that through this piece of legislation. That's an important change that we're seeing.

Once again, you know, when we consider the loss of jobs and the loss of resources and the loss of research opportunities that we're seeing across the province, whether it's in the ministry itself, whether it's in Alberta Innovates, whether it's at the Lethbridge research centre, it's quite frightening. We've seen this from previous Conservative governments. When I think back to the term of the federal Conservatives and their absolute attacks on scientists, on researchers, on anyone that might question the motive of their government, it seems like we're seeing a very similar playbook moving forward here in our province, and it's very concerning.

3:50

It's very concerning because it seems that this government is willing to cut the jobs and attack anyone that is willing to speak critically against this UCP government. It's unfortunate not only from a perspective of ensuring that we are able to bring new investments to the province and ensure that the research is being done to understand what is on the horizon, but it's unfortunate that a government would even come to the table without having all the best experts there at the table with them.

Once again, we see some major concerns in this legislation. We have major concerns about what we see as a lack of importance placed on water monitoring from this provincial government. You know, currently the irrigation districts must pay for their water monitoring. With the changes, once again, that we're seeing to coal, there are increased concerns that water monitoring will have to be done more frequently.

The fact is that the government is going in the opposite direction through this legislation and other moves that we've seen from this government. We're seeing the exact opposite, where there is a greater expectation put on, whether it's corporations to do that monitoring themselves, whether it's municipalities or other towns and councils and counties. Once again we're seeing that important work being downloaded onto municipalities and other stakeholders, which really seems to be the game and the plan of this provincial government, this UCP government, to download as much as they can onto other orders of government or other orders of society and then come back and say: well, we're not sure why you can't handle it even though we cut all of your funding and told you that you have to do all this work yourself. It's very unfortunate.

Thankfully, in this instance the federal government has come to the table and expressed their interest in bringing new investment to the province of Alberta, and thankfully the provincial government has moved forward and is not going to let this money sit on the table or be taken off the table from a lack of movement and a lack of consultation. Thankfully, we're seeing what we have here in Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021. At this point, once again, I am prepared to support this, but it's unfortunate that we're seeing many of the other changes and missed opportunities from this UCP government.

With that, I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker, but I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to this legislation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak on this Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021. I'm actually very grateful that I'm hearing members from the NDP caucus speak on this bill. You know, I always appreciate hearing their opinion on any subject matter. This one is particularly interesting because they are showing such an interest in what farmers and ranchers have to say. I wish they had shared that kind of moxie for what they had to say back when they were doing their so-called consultation on Bill 6. With that said, I'm grateful to hear that they're willing to support such a great piece of legislation. I would also like to thank the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry for bringing this bill forward and making the necessary legislation that will provide clarity to irrigation districts.

Irrigation districts and infrastructure in Alberta are vital to our economy and influence the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the region and provide great value for the province of Alberta, particularly in my area of Cardston-Siksika. The 8,000 kilometres of canals and pipelines and 57 water storage reservoirs convey water to the arid region of southern Alberta. This provides water for food production, communities, businesses, wildlife and wetlands, and recreation opportunities. The irrigation industry contributes \$3.6 billion annually to Alberta's GDP, which represents about 20 per cent of the agrifood sector GDP, on only 4.7 per cent of the province's cultivated land.

As the irrigation industry is so vital to our economy, it is important that we have legislation that meets the needs there. The current Irrigation Districts Act has been giving issues to the irrigation districts. This is because of the ambiguity regarding what constitutes a commercial activity, which creates risk that impacts financial institutions that are willing to lend funds to the irrigation districts. Mr. Speaker, without these funds irrigation districts are unable to have large-scale projects to build or maintain irrigation networks. Bill 54 will mitigate these issues. By resolving this issue, it will satisfy final conditions associated with the nearly \$1 billion infrastructure deal that was announced in October.

While I'm speaking on that, just for a moment I would again like to express my sincere gratitude to the government for investing in southern Alberta. Governments talk about investing quite often, and I think the federal government often uses that word a bit too loosely. But when you're talking about irrigation and investment, a number of the irrigation district presidents and those who use the water in the irrigation districts will tell you that that has almost a 3 to 1 ratio return on investment. True investment in southern Alberta, something southern Alberta has been asking for, something that they're getting, is a commitment that this government has made to southern Alberta to ensure that they are not left off the discussion table, that they are being thought of regularly. It's what I was elected to do as the Member for Cardston-Siksika, something that I have continually spoken with the minister of agriculture about just generally, the needs of agriculture in southern Alberta, and I am grateful that he has listened. I'm grateful the Premier has listened.

This deal that I just spoke about is expected to create up to 6,800 direct and indirect permanent jobs and 1,280 construction jobs. As a result, irrigated area is expected to increase by up to 200,000 acres, a 15 per cent increase, across the eight irrigation districts without increasing the overall water allocation. That is substantial,

Mr. Speaker. It will also enable future transactions for projects which are expected to generate more than \$430 million in provincial GDP. The irrigation industry is a vital part of Alberta's economy and will be well into the future.

These legislative changes will allow Alberta's irrigation industry to borrow funds for large-scale projects that would be a major boost for Alberta's economic recovery. We have seen that agriculture has been a leader in Alberta's economic recovery, especially throughout the COVID pandemic, when a lot of other industries were hurting financially. These men and women who work in agriculture continue to put one foot in front of the other, get up every day, feed the province, and they feed the country. To them I am very grateful. Agriculture has and will continue to be an important part of Alberta's economic recovery now and in the future.

By changing this legislation to be more flexible for Alberta's irrigation industry to borrow funds for large-scale irrigation projects, we will help grow the agrifood industry, expand primary agriculture production, and support a diversified, value-added processing industry by enabling irrigation districts to manage their water allocation more efficiently.

Another change that this bill will make is making board member term limits. Some irrigation districts, Mr. Speaker, have asked Alberta's government to enable them to set limits on the number of consecutive terms board members can serve. This is a common practice on many boards. It will also help ensure that irrigation district boards are adaptive, innovative, and positioned for the future. But other districts have expressed that they do not want to have set limits on consecutive terms as they value the experience of long-serving members. This amendment will give irrigation districts the option to set limits on the number of consecutive terms of their board members.

4:00

As irrigation districts are a vital part of our economy, I believe that ensuring that their boards are filled with the most capable and innovative members is key to keeping this industry thriving. I know that irrigation districts will make the correct choices that have the balance of experience, innovation, and adaptation that'll also be able to position irrigation in a positive way and will set them up to be successful in the future.

Irrigation districts are very important to our economy and to our agriculture sector. I am proud to have so many vital irrigation districts right in my constituency of Cardston-Siksika. This includes Western, the Bow River, Lethbridge Northern, Magrath, United, Mountain View, Leavitt, Aetna, and Raymond irrigation districts. This accounts for over 1.2 million acre-feet of the total licensed volume of seven different water sources. Irrigation districts not only provide jobs in the area but also ensure that our agriculture industry in southern Alberta continues to thrive. I know that this legislation will be very beneficial to my riding of Cardston-Siksika and solve many of the concerns that irrigation districts have had.

I'm thankful to the minister of agriculture for bringing up this very important piece of legislation to the Assembly. These much-needed changes will ensure that our irrigation districts and irrigation industry will thrive now and in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021, on a topic

and an issue that I've learned a fair bit about during my past tenure as the critic for agriculture. I had the opportunity to attend general meetings of the Alberta Irrigation Districts Association and listen to some of their concerns. Of course, one of the things that would always come up is the continued support of the provincial government for ongoing programs that allow the irrigation districts to continue improving their network of underground pipeline systems versus the open canal systems of water transmission that have been the historical norm.

While general support from our side of the House will be found for this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, there are some concerns about a couple of the elements, the basic tenets of the legislation. Of course, one is the increase of the borrowing ability or capacity of the irrigation districts. This responsibility, of course, is something they've been asking for, which is fine, but what I hope not to see as a result in the future is a move by the government to erode their current levels of support for programs such as the annual monies that go towards the conversion of open water canals to underground pipelines, which, of course, do a lot to increase the efficiency of water use as not so much is lost to evaporation.

By giving the irrigation districts this increased borrowing capacity to accommodate their ability to take advantage of the loan monies under the federal government offering, I'm hoping that it doesn't absolve the province of its responsibility to continue funding these infrastructure projects on an annual basis and that the province doesn't, that this government doesn't see fit as a result to say: "All right, you've got this borrowing capacity. It's up to you. You borrow the money yourself, and you pay for it over time. We're removing ourselves from that responsibility." That's a bit of a fear that I have, and I'm going to be watching for that. I'm sure that the Alberta Irrigation Districts Association will be very much having a keen eye on that as well because it's a topic that – it raises a concern, so I'll be certainly watching for that.

Nonetheless, I know that the Alberta Irrigation Districts Association, others in the province who are involved in irrigation farming certainly welcome this ability to borrow larger amounts and take advantage of this program offered through the federal government in conjunction with the province. In principle, yes, indeed, support will be found on this side of the House and also for the term limits issue as well. I think probably the right balance has been struck in that the irrigation districts that wish to maintain term limits can do so, and those that wish to implement them have that choice as well. So it does give that flexibility, and for this I think it was a wise move to give that choice to the irrigation districts as to whether they implemented term limits or not according to their own wishes at the local level.

Now, one of the things that I had to say, though, also revolves around what isn't in this piece of legislation. It is an act that's brought forward to amend the Irrigation Districts Act at a time when we are critically looking at supply chains and agricultural production globally right now during a pandemic period. One of the concerns, of course, is that people globally are looking at shrinking their supply chain and looking to grow more products locally. That goes for those individual countries who look to import Canadian products and Canadian agricultural products. I know that we as a country, Canada, send inspectors globally to inspect plants and operations and agricultural production right throughout the world to ensure that those products meet the standards that we expect in terms of health and safety for importation into Canada. That's, of course, a goal that we have in Alberta and in Canada, to make sure that the reciprocating inspections that are done by countries that we hope to export to are also up to snuff so that we do not threaten in any way by our lack of adherence to uniform standards our export capacities or our ability to export into certain markets.

The reason I bring this up, Mr. Speaker, is because while it's important to involve the federal government in conjunction with the provincial government in bringing this larger piece of financing to the irrigation districts and enable them to take advantage of it by increasing their borrowing abilities, there's much more that could be done to ensure that in this particular moment in history our irrigation districts are enabled to take full advantage on an ongoing basis of the global opportunities that we have rather than going backwards.

Now, one of the things that's been done in the ministry, the ministry of agriculture, of course, is that staffing levels have dropped as a result of cuts to the ministry, and that has affected the inspection and testing of water. It may be left to the individual irrigation districts or to the industry itself to perform the water testing and get the results needed that will verify the quality of water for those who we wish to export to. The integrity of this whole process, Mr. Speaker, is something that I would have hoped that this piece of legislation would have addressed, on top of the two major issues that it tackles. It's critically important that anyone we wish to export to has absolute faith in the quality of the water that is used in our agricultural production in our irrigated districts in the province.

I say this from a background of some experience within the food processing industry and also in the real estate industry, where water testing and testing was done on a regular basis. The absolute uniformity and the standardization and the integrity of those tests has to be maintained. For example, in the meat-packing plant where I used to work, there were standards that had to be maintained and the test quality had to be done properly and there were ways it had to be done and the inspector was there to ensure it happened in that particular way. With the changes that we don't see to the act, guaranteeing that the testing procedures are going to be properly monitored by a government agency, which no longer exists because of lack of funding, it is something that perhaps risks the integrity in the minds of those people we like to export to about our water quality.

4:10

On top of that, never mind the ongoing need to provide absolute clear quality testing and absolute faith in the whole process, are, of course, the threats that we have of new coal mines being opened up in the eastern slopes, bringing the possibility of disrepute of our water quality for irrigated districts. We're pretty concerned about that. I know that the irrigation districts themselves are very, very concerned about the integrity of the water supply as a result of future coal mining exploration and development that may take place in our eastern slopes. That is something that this piece of legislation doesn't, in my view, adequately address. It certainly looks to tackle a couple of issues that the irrigation districts would like to see, and we agree with those, but there's such an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, here to have made much greater strides to reflect exactly what threats are faced by irrigation farmers and the whole irrigation industry in this province.

It's something that we look to expand with this new funding, absolutely, and perhaps even to a greater extent, but it's increasingly becoming a larger industry, and it's something that deserves to be protected in a larger light. Two hundred thousand additional acres is certainly welcomed, but if countries who we're exporting to are taking a look at our process and saying, "Well, we don't know if this water testing process has the integrity it needs, and we don't know for sure what impact the selenium pollution will have from future coal mining," we won't have an export market, Mr. Speaker. It's all well and good to provide dollars and borrowing capacity to expand the irrigation districts and to do some housekeeping

legislation which allows them to increase the term limits if they so wish or to maintain the term limits of the board of directors of each irrigation district, but overarching that is the requirement to actually have the export markets that we so rely on in the irrigation districts.

Another example I can mention, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the process – because, you know, we don't know for sure how the testing will take place to test the quality of the water samples, whose responsibility it'll be. I know in my duties as a real estate agent, when you had an acreage or agricultural properties that you were selling, of course well water and the quality of that well water was something that had to be ascertained before you could sell it. Any buyer is interested in whether you've got quality water, potable healthy water or not. The testing you could get from a provincial office, the test bottles and so forth, had instructions on them. For the ill informed, they would possibly just take a sample from the tap, which is – you know, you're drinking from the tap, but that is potentially a contaminated source. The actual source of the water had to come from an uncontaminated location, right from the source of the well, before it went into a reservoir or a tank or through the housing system of the internal pipes, because that would allow it to be potentially contaminated.

My point is that it's incredibly important how this process for water testing and sampling actually works and is stipulated. With the lack of uniformity that may result from not having provincial oversight and provincial testers go out and actually take these samples, we may be putting ourselves at risk of having people that we export to claiming that our processes are not inviolate. They have to be absolutely subject to scrutiny and pass the muster of those markets that we wish to export to. We're talking about billions of dollars' worth of exports, Mr. Speaker, and we're talking about increasing our agricultural irrigated areas by 200,000 acres to serve those export markets.

We have to be doggone sure, Mr. Speaker, that those people who are reporting back to their respective governments are making a report that says: yes, indeed, this water that the irrigation districts are receiving is absolutely pristine, it's not affected by selenium from coal deposits, it's not contaminated, and the processes they use to test it and collect it and actually put it through the organic and multiple tests it has to go through to satisfy those export markets are beyond reproach. That's the concern I've got.

I mean, we tinkered a little bit to identify a couple of specific issues that the irrigation districts hope to solve, yet we've really done a drive-by without any consideration of the wider topics that the whole irrigation/agricultural sector in Alberta has looming in front of it, that really demand a much greater level of attention than this bill actually addresses. It was a missed opportunity, I think, Mr. Speaker, to do that, and I'm disappointed. Perhaps the minister will follow up with a much more wide-ranging piece of legislation that takes into account the realities of today wherein a supply chain examination globally and of individual exporters such as ourselves, who rely upon our agricultural exports to sustain our industry – we certainly produce way more than we eat ourselves.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for being so kind as I was battling a technical difficulty that could result in me owing money to a charity. I would be happy to do so because that was rude on my behalf, and I really do appreciate her kindness in allowing me to speak today.

As members of the government caucus know and maybe even members opposite know, I am very passionate about a couple of things, and one of those things is irrigation. Being the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, I have the privilege of representing one of the largest irrigation districts in the province, namely the Eastern irrigation district. In Brooks-Medicine Hat we have a lot going for us. We're a really industrial part of the province where we have the ability to grow food unlike any other. We have some of the highest heat units in the country, which, for those who are not familiar with agriculture, means that we can produce very expensive crops quite easily. That wouldn't be possible without the work of irrigation and without the innovations that irrigation has provided to our riding and to our country.

Mr. Speaker, there's a book called *Tapping the Bow*. It was one of the very first things that I was given upon entering public office. I was gifted this book by, actually, two different constituents who saw that it was a good idea for me to read this book. The book might not sound like a page-turner to everyone, but it certainly is interesting in that it outlines the history of irrigation in our province. A very wise man in this Chamber once told me that whisky is for drinking but water is for fighting, and that certainly is the truth. For anybody who is wondering, that member is the Minister of Municipal Affairs and of Transportation. It's one of his most famous quotes, I think, in our caucus. We know that we need to make sure that water is protected in this province. We also know that we need to acknowledge the resource that water truly is as the demands for water increase across the world.

Tapping the Bow is a book that outlines the formation of the Bow River irrigation district, which I don't represent, actually. It is one of the largest irrigation projects in North America, and it turned the Palliser Triangle, which is in the south, from an arid wasteland into over 600,000 hectares of prime farmland.

4:20

Alberta has some of the most bountiful agricultural production because of irrigation projects like this, and it's because of tapping the Bow, so to speak, and because of irrigation projects like the Palliser Triangle that irrigation districts such as the EID and others can exist today. In case you guys were ever having irrigation district trivia, now you can participate.

Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021, allows southern Alberta to continue to be part of Canada's vital breadbasket. I notice that even in larger cities there are a lot of bumper stickers all over that say: if you ate today, thank a farmer. We know that around the world, especially in India right now, in Punjab, there's been conversation around the essential nature of farmers and that without farmers there is no food, and the same can be said in Alberta.

We know that irrigation contributes \$3.6 billion to the GDP of our province every year. For perspective that is 20 per cent of agrifood on only 4.7 per cent of Alberta's farmland. So a great investment, for anybody who is looking to move forward on that, obviously, would be irrigation. We know that the ingenuity that is required to irrigate such an arid landscape is truly a marvel, and the ability of these districts to modernize their infrastructure is essential moving forward.

Just as we ran as a government on jobs, the economy, and pipelines, one thing that we can do – it doesn't have to be oil in the pipeline; you can also have a water pipeline. The ability of irrigation districts to go from having open culverts to pipelines will help us to increase our efficiency and use less water to do more work. We know that these water pipelines will decrease the rate of evaporation, which is obviously important, and reduce overall water consumption from our headwaters, something that's very

important for environmental conservation as well as for costs on our farmlands and our farmers.

When we're talking about water, it's important to talk about the way that farmers acquire water on their land, and that's through having water rights. We know that the old saying is: first in line, first in right. That's how water rights are allocated throughout the province. The Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, Bill 54, does absolutely nothing to change those things.

I've heard concerns from the members opposite about how coal leasing would impact that, but they would know and we know that the South Saskatchewan River basin is closed to new water licences and that the only opportunity for growth is doing more with existing allocations, which is exactly what this bill allows them to do by converting these culverts and reducing evaporation to create pipelines for water to flow through to be more efficient.

Last year I was very happy to be in Calgary at the Stampede grounds in the Big Four to be with the minister as he announced the \$815 million deal in conjunction with the Canada Infrastructure Bank. I can say, for myself, that \$815 million is a sum of money – I would never in a million years be able to fathom just how much money that really is, and I think the average Albertan doesn't have, you know, \$815 million in their back pocket. For me, it's just a very large sum of money to think about. For banks, they know that this is a large sum of money. They know how important it is to have certainty in their investment, and we know that in business certainty is a very important thing. So this deal, with those funds that are being allocated through the federal and provincial governments as well as the Canada Infrastructure Bank, is contingent upon certainty that these projects will be built and that that investment is going to yield good returns and, of course, go towards investing in infrastructure for these communities.

Now, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act rightfully removes the rivers of red tape, for lack of a better word, pun intended, when it comes to finding a way to ensure that irrigation districts are set up for success. The purpose of a district is defined in the act in four ways, and that is

- (a) to convey and deliver water through the irrigation works of the district . . .
- (b) to divert and use quantities of water [under] the terms and conditions of its licence . . .
- (c) to construct, operate and maintain . . . irrigation works . . . and
- (d) to maintain and promote the economic viability of the district.

The current act also refers to commercial activity, but that is very broadly defined. The problem is that the CIB may even apply this broad definition to joint funding, so if a proposed project was deemed commercial activity, they might be hesitant to lend money without greater oversight by their members. That's why we're providing that oversight as well as that clarity around what commercial activity is so that banks and other lending institutions wouldn't have to wade through the waters of red tape, so to speak.

Even if the projects might be in the best interests of the district, this uncertainty that's created by the act without these amendments could be a very sad end. Right now a bank may actually require the SMRID, the St. Mary River irrigation district, which is one that I represent, as well as the Eastern irrigation district to have a referendum of its own membership to fund infrastructure renewal if the project is large enough.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that our farmers work hard enough, that our irrigators work hard enough as well as our irrigation districts. They go through a lot of work. They already wade through enough red tape as it is. They don't need to do more to access money earmarked for these projects that have already been allowed. Bill 54 is a step

towards a commitment to slash red tape in this province by at least a third and keep Alberta innovative and in the forefront of the industry. I believe that by amending the Irrigation Districts Act, we are doing our jobs as legislators representing Albertans and supporting their needs, and I will be voting in favour of Bill 54, obviously, because as a representative of one of the largest irrigation districts in the province, I'm very, very pleased to see this innovation coming forward as well as to be able to provide that for my constituents.

Just some fun facts about irrigation, not that I haven't provided you guys with enough answers for trivia questions for years to come. We'll keep going. With this investment from the Canada Infrastructure Bank and the provincial and federal governments, over 6,800 direct and indirect permanent jobs and 1,200 construction jobs are expected to be created. That's a direct commitment to jobs, the economy, and pipelines. Like I said, maybe this isn't an oil pipeline, but this is certainly a pipeline that we can all get behind. It's a direct commitment from our government to say: promise made, promise kept. I know that I've heard a lot about this bill in my constituency as many in my constituency are irrigators, and it was something that was brought up time and time again.

I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Manning who brought up invasive species as well, and certainly that is another issue – yes, it was the Member for Edmonton-Manning who brought up invasive species as being another issue – coming up. That, of course, wouldn't be something that would likely be under the administrative portions of the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act but would probably be something with Environment and Parks. I know that in my first couple of months after being elected, I met with the Minister of Environment and Parks to discuss invasive species – actually, this was something that even came up during my nomination – and how important it is to protect these waterways.

We know that something like a zebra mussel can be incredibly contagious and incredibly damaging to our canals if it were to get in. The effects: you can't even overstate how horrible it would be if they were to get into our waterways. I agree, and I'm glad to see that this is a point that, actually, the opposition and the government can agree upon, that we know we really, really need to be protecting our water. Water is so integral in every place in Alberta but especially in southern Alberta, where it is hotter than heck, and there isn't a whole heck of a lot of rain. With any kind of water that we have, we have to find ways to store it and use it efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, I will close in saying that I am elated to be able to support Bill 54. I'm excited to be able to talk about irrigation. The best part is that I know there's Committee of the Whole and third reading coming up, so I'll, hopefully, be able to speak to it again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity today, and I'll resign my time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anyone wish to make quick comments or questions.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021. I have a number of comments that will likely sound similar to some of the comments that my colleagues have made. I do agree and recognize that water is absolutely critical, and looking at opportunities to enhance access to water in southern Alberta to support our farmers, our ranchers, our agricultural sector is significant. In fact, we know that our agricultural sector is the

second-largest sector and driver of Alberta's GDP. It's absolutely critical. We have a number of incredible success stories in southern Alberta. You know, knowing that this government has committed a significant amount of money in this bill in their \$800 million irrigation announcement but also in some of the changes that they're making is a positive step forward, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

Of course, you'll recall that under the previous government there were a number of infrastructure investments that we made in southern Alberta around the city of Lethbridge that, of course, attracted in fact the largest investment that Cavendish made at one moment in time. It came because of, really, a whole-of-government approach, Mr. Speaker, that didn't just support Cavendish. We were very, very careful to ensure that by providing some infrastructure investments and supports for the region, it would mean attracting new developments and investments into the region. Cavendish was one of those investments. We know that we have, you know, some of the best agricultural lands in our province. I'll argue that those lands are scattered throughout the province, but we know that southern Alberta faces certain challenges that many of the other parts of the province don't have to face. Of course, water is absolutely critical.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill. I think there is significant opportunity for Alberta to expand the investments when it comes to food processing. Increasing agrivalue is absolutely critical. I know that under our time in government this was a priority of ours. We made some critical investments like expanding the Leduc food processing incubator, the largest in the world, which, of course, has some incredible success stories. One that I always enjoyed talking about and still do is a company called Siwin Foods, that was a tenant in the Leduc food processing incubator. They graduated from that and set up and built a brand new facility and are in the process of – or at least they were a couple of years ago – not only producing some of the best dumplings made outside of China but, of course, were in the process of producing these dumplings to sell back into China, which is quite fascinating when you think about that.

Again, you know, that's an example of a successful company that needed some support from the government of Alberta. Again, on this side of the House we believe that there is a role for government, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes it's a small role; sometimes it's a larger role. This investment in irrigation is a great example of a larger role that government can play and should play in order to be able to attract these kinds of investments. I think there's significant opportunity to increase it. We know that Alberta and Canada have a very, very strong brand and reputation in the international community, especially in many countries that know that we have pristine air, water, and land and want to make investments. In fact, you know, one could argue that our products from Alberta are in high demand all over the world, so making these kinds of investments will attract broader investments and, of course, create jobs for Albertans and ensure that there is prosperity to come.

Now, one of the issues that was raised by a couple of my colleagues, you know, is the fact that one of the irrigation issues that's not being addressed and that we would like to see addressed is water monitoring. Currently, Mr. Speaker, the irrigation districts have to pay for that themselves, but there's a concern, and this is a legitimate concern. I appreciate that debate on this bill so far has been quite respectful, but the fact of the matter is that any changes to coal policies will have a direct impact on our water. We know that water can be very easily argued as the most important resource that we have to sustain life. The fact of the matter is that the 2021 budget for water monitoring out of the Ministry of Agriculture and

Forestry was cut, so the districts are asking: well, who's going to be accountable to ensure that proper water monitoring is happening?

This is a very legitimate concern, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I know, from previous trade missions I've participated on, that ensuring that we are monitoring our water to guarantee an extremely high standard will directly impact whether or not investment comes to this province. If there is a shadow of a doubt that there either is a blip or a lack of monitoring or that there is a challenge or a potential risk to the quality of our water, international investment will flee, or at least it will not come here, and we can't take that chance because it is absolutely critical. We're talking about Alberta's reputation. We're talking about the livelihoods of thousands of Albertans who produce agricultural products for millions of people world-wide. I think that it's a legitimate question. My hope is that the government will address that in Committee of the Whole. We'll just earmark that as one of the issues that is not being addressed at the moment.

Now, there are some additional changes or there were additional changes proposed by some of the irrigation districts that are not reflected in this bill. We know that, again, the government has an opportunity not only to respond but also an opportunity to bring forward amendments. Our hope, by flagging this and amplifying the voices of the irrigation districts, is that the government will address these issues. One is around planning and notification of construction so that folks can make plans not only with their agribusinesses but also with their lives, knowing what and when changes and construction are going to be happening in their communities.

Another one. We're curious – and I know colleagues of mine have asked – why only eight of the 13 irrigation canals are registered. Maybe it's because only eight of the 13 either responded to a survey or showed interest. I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker. It would be great for the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry to be able to confirm why five of the districts are not included. It could just be that they chose not to. It could be that – well, I won't speculate as to the reasons, but it would be great to know why that is.

A question that was raised by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Manning regarding northern Alberta. I know that we have different climates and different landscapes throughout the province, which impacts agriculture and farming throughout the province and differently, but I am curious to know if there were any plans in northern Alberta, where we have sections of agricultural land that have the opposite problem of too much water. How is this government planning to support farmers in northern Alberta, who, quite rightly, would argue that they are equally as important as farmers in southern Alberta? I'm curious to hear if and what supports are being prepared or thought of or programs that are being debated for northern Alberta.

4:40

Another question that was asked. Recognizing that the government has indicated that there are some shovel-ready projects, I think it's fair to ask what those projects may be. We know that agriculture is important. The government has alluded to some sector strategies. Of course, those are still very ambiguous, ambiguous in the sense, Mr. Speaker, that even during estimates a number of questions have been asked of a number of different ministers regarding sector strategies, to which, unfortunately, there's been very little detail, detail as far as what those strategies might be, what the programs are, who's going to be eligible for them, and what the dollar investments are that are going to be attached with it. I think those are also legitimate questions.

I did want to just raise some of those concerns. I think it's important that the government continues to work with other orders of government to secure funding. You know, it's very, very clear

how our provincial UCP government feel about the federal government, but at the end of the day we need to try to attract as much federal investment back into our province. Some of the tactics that our provincial government has used over the past couple of years have probably not helped in the fight to get dollars back into Alberta. We know that there are a number of examples of other programs where money was left on the table. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's a shame. It's a shame because on the one hand the government will talk about all of the money that goes from Alberta to Ottawa through equalization, yet when there are opportunities to recoup or to get federal dollars reinvested back into our province, there are significant dollar amounts, hundreds of millions of dollars, that are not being taken off the table and invested back into Alberta. That's a real concern because, quite frankly, we need – Albertans work hard for their money, they pay their taxes, and they should be getting dollars reinvested back into their communities.

I don't agree with, you know, the tactics of trying to play partisanship or leaving money on the table in order to point fingers. I think Albertans want to see results. They want to see outcomes, and they want to see the government make good on its promises. I won't go too far down the path of some of the programs that have not been producing the outcomes that the government committed, but in this bill we do see that the federal government did come to the table to provide some support, so I will encourage this UCP government to work with the federal government where possible. [An electronic device sounded]

I do find it fascinating, Mr. Speaker, that in the course of the last two hours I've heard more cellphones and computers go off than I have ever heard standing in this Chamber, and I've yet to see any members make a commitment to donate to a charity.

Ms Glasgo: I did. I did on the record.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Then for the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat I apologize for that comment. She did in fact make a commitment for a charitable donation. Thank you, Member. I think we're still short a few other members in the Chamber.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I will be in support of this bill and hope that the debate can continue and that we can get some answers to our questions that Albertans are asking us and that we're asking on behalf of them. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House on behalf of my constituents and add my comments to Bill 54, Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021. Looking at the time limit, I was planning to speak more in detail in third reading, but I could not really, actually, control my excitement to add even my limited comments on this bill.

As my colleagues already have actually demonstrated their support in favour of this bill, due to some of the important points that are being addressed, specifically given the amount of money, the investment that's coming – that's, you know, exciting – and given specifically the role of the agriculture sector in Alberta, in the general economy, I would say, in the province, adding its value to the GDP and having the actual strength and the size of the industry – given, like, 1.7 million irrigated acres involved in the province, the irrigation industry itself generates about \$2.4 billion in annual labour income and supports about 50,000 jobs. Irrigation-related agriculture processing generates about \$2 billion in total annual sales and accounts for about 18 per cent of total provincial food

processing sales. That's quite a bit. The irrigation industry contributes up to \$3.6 billion annually to Alberta's gross domestic product, GDP, which represents about 20 per cent of the agrifood sector GDP, on only – that's, I think, something to be noted – 4.7 per cent of the province's cultivated land base.

There's a lot to say. I will not probably spend my whole 15 minutes today in second reading. I'm happy to support this bill, stating that this is a good step towards the right direction, but this issue related to agriculture really needs a comprehensive, you know, approach: consultations, dialogues, and a comprehensive policy framework.

Looking at what's happening around the globe, specifically the crisis the economy has demonstrated over the year-long COVID-19 pandemic, I just wanted to bring this information for the record, that the countries like India, with a population of over 1 billion people: their GDP in the past, due to a number of reasons, one of them probably the COVID-19 pandemic, reached below zero, negative. When a country of such, like, strength, with lots of minerals and a number of resources that the country was known for – the only sector that added to the GDP was agriculture. Not that agriculture, you know, showed growth in GDP, but it's also important to look at this.

I will just bring up a little conversation that I was having in my family back a few weeks, a few months. I usually, you know, discuss the topics with my recently graduated kids because they're struggling to find jobs. They graduated last year, and there was no hope in the technology sector to find jobs in the situation right now in the province. They're also very – how would I say? – intelligent people, especially the young generation. They are looking for a solution for the crisis they're facing today. My kids were talking all about the growing sector in technology, even with companies called Apple, Facebook, and renewables, Microsoft. Like, the companies are already reaching on top and reaching their limits, and they were talking, like, that it hasn't probably left much growth for the big corporates.

4:50

Now, a number of other companies, if they wanted to stay and hold their status, might have to look into some different avenues. One of those is agriculture. Speaking that truth, the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat actually mentioned the issue among Indian farmers right now. That will show, actually, the actual challenge and the crisis and the contribution and the importance of agriculture, that the big corporates who have grown into energy, who have grown into technology are really, actually looking for their potential, where they can grow, and they're working very hard to get into agriculture. That is the very clash between the farmers and the corporate sectors right now in India.

Spain actually had – I will probably try to bring in-depth and detailed information into third reading of this Bill 54. Spain has legislated the minimum sale price for the crops or the produce in Spain, and France is struggling with the same challenge. Germany is also initiating the dialogue around this.

What I wanted to say is that, you know, for me what was surprising and something to learn: even when we move from India to one of the developed places like Alberta and Canada, we seem to just assume that everything has been dealt and addressed with professional manners. But looking at this bill, Alberta has so many challenges to go through, so this is an important very first step I wanted to support. If we are looking for an independent economy, this self-serving economy, the agriculture sector can play an incredibly important role, so we need to support that.

I also wanted to highlight that it's not just a political blame game. It is also the contradiction in the government's approach when

simultaneously we are debating Bill 54 and, on the other hand, the government is conducting the online survey on coal mining, specifically on categories 1 and 2 land. Water protection, on the other hand, is being really compromised. This is something I really wanted to actually put on the record, and I wanted to bring the information to the House.

At this point in time I will look forward to bringing more information during the third reading on this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a second time]

Bill 55

College of Alberta School Superintendents Act

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Feehan]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate? I believe the individual who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. McIver: Very eye-catching.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can't even repeat that on *Hansard*, but a very witty comment from the front bench.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 55, College of Alberta School Superintendents Act. You know, I think that there are only a few changes in this bill, so I don't think I will take up all of my time, but I did want to just comment on it while we're in second reading. Just to begin by, I guess, outlining the fact that education is absolutely critical, for many years, in fact, since I've begun my time in this Chamber, I've talked about Alberta's greatest resource. I know that there have been some differing opinions on that, but I truly believe that people are our greatest resource, and investing in education is absolutely critical to ensuring that Alberta will continue to be a global leader that will continue to offer the highest quality of life for our citizens.

You know, this bill is talking about superintendents specifically. I can tell you that myself and my colleagues and, I'd imagine, colleagues on the other side of the Chamber as well have been hearing from Alberta students and staff and parents over the number of changes that are occurring simultaneously. Recognizing that this bill doesn't deal with curriculum – this is about superintendents – of course, as you'll know, Mr. Speaker, our superintendents are put in place to oversee school divisions, and that, of course, impacts the education that our students are receiving.

One of the things that we are hearing from our students, again, staff at schools, families is that they're calling for a number of things. One of the things that they're calling for is to ensure – every year we have an average of 20,000 new students entering the school system – that there will in fact be adequate supports, meaning adequate resources, so we have teachers to teach our students, that we work toward reducing class sizes, knowing the impact that the quality of education has on students.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard, at different times during education debates in this Chamber, members trying to make an argument that the quality of education and teaching does not go up or down depending on the number of students in a classroom. I can tell you from experience – I am a teacher; I taught high school for a number

of years – that having fewer students means that I and teachers have more time with each student individually, which increases the quality of education. Even when I look, you know, at my educational career, when I went to postsecondary I started off at Concordia University College. I did that by choice because it's a smaller academic school, meaning smaller classrooms. Students are able to get to know their professors better, on a first-name basis, which I believe set me off on the right foot to continue my educational career. Yes, I graduated from the U of A and am very proud of that.

But when we talk about quality of education, you know, class size is one of the factors. We also know that our schools need adequate support. Teachers have an increasingly diverse group of students that they are teaching, with a variety of different needs and backgrounds, and those students and teachers need to be supported if we want our kids to receive the highest quality of education.

5:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, you'll know that Alberta in the past had been a global leader when it comes to our curriculum, when it comes to our students. In fact, when I was on a number of trade missions in Asia, on one mission in China it was the first class to graduate using the Alberta curriculum. These were students that came in in kindergarten using the Alberta curriculum, and they were graduating. How proud they were and we were that our curriculum is used, or at least was used, by a number of different countries around the world. That's now being questioned. I'm sure that there are jurisdictions that are looking at some of the proposed changes with concern and not sure if they're going to continue. In fact, we know the Northwest Territories had agreements with Alberta to use our curriculum and has used our curriculum for decades, and it was tabled in this Chamber that they are uncertain if they are going to continue that agreement, and we know that in part that's because of the changes that are being proposed in this new curriculum.

Now, again, Mr. Speaker, here we're talking about this piece of legislation dealing with superintendents. You know, one of the issues or questions that I do have for the government, that I hope they will respond to with this legislation, is the uncertainty that currently exists with respect to principals and vice-principals, who directly work in schools, and whether or not they'll be subject to the new college. They need the certainty. I can tell you, from speaking to a number of principals and those that are leaders within our education system, that they made it really clear that, you know, in this bill it's critical that CASS, or the new college of superintendents that this bill is proposing to create, coming into effect or being the regulator starting in September 2022, is made up of peers, of educators, that it's not going to be made up of administrators who are not educators, who don't understand the realities, the challenges, and the ins and outs of the roles. They may recognize the importance of it, but it needs to be made up of peers.

Again, you know, we look at this bill, and we're in the process of reaching out to superintendents and other school trustees, et cetera, to get their opinion. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this is second reading, so we do have a little bit of time with this piece of legislation to ensure that we engage in a robust debate with stakeholders. I appreciate that the government may stand up and say, "Yes, we've consulted with folks far and wide," but I think the Official Opposition would like to verify that with stakeholders directly.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Other changes in this bill. Maybe I should have started with that, Mr. Speaker. Within this legislation the government is estimating that roughly 1,300 managers will become regulated members, the

minister will no longer approve superintendent contracts with school boards, and a CASS disciplinary committee would determine if there were allegations of a serious misconduct. But that can only be recommended to the minister, and at that point it's the minister's decision what consequences may arise from that.

What this bill does do is continue, when it comes to pay for superintendents, that that would continue to follow the grid that was developed under our government. Because of that, the college does not assume any collective bargaining type functions.

Again, you know, providing an update to this bill and creating an update to the position of superintendent by creating a professional college for educational superintendents and deputy superintendents employed in the public, separate, and francophone school authorities seems at the first reading – I guess we're in second reading, but the first view of this bill is that it makes sense. Again, I'm always curious to know if it was, in fact, superintendents asking for these changes. Who is asking for the changes? What is the challenge or the problem that we are trying to address or correct through this legislation?

As well, Mr. Speaker, the college will be responsible for professional development and setting learning requirements for its members. Actually – you know what? – I don't know who was doing that for superintendents before this piece of legislation moved forward. Now, maybe this is the way to bring it all into one house, into one department. If there is a cost saving to this, I'm very curious to know what that would be and what that would look like and, really, just for the government to get into the nuts and bolts behind this proposed piece of legislation.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, for me, I think it's critical that principals and vice-principals, who are working in schools, remain part of the ATA. I can tell you that there are examples in other jurisdictions where principals and vice-principals have become part of management, separate from teachers, and that has had some negative consequences for the culture that goes on at the school, that principals are themselves, first and foremost, teachers, and, you know, depending on which studies you look at, some have asserted that what this does is drives a wedge between principals and teachers. I think it creates an unnecessary additional hierarchal structure where, again, principals, vice-principals are, first and foremost, teachers.

In fact, during this COVID pandemic every principal that I've talked to has done more teaching in the past year, covering for teachers going off on isolation, than they have for many, many years. Now, I know, in talking to a number of principals – there are a number of them that are personal friends of mine that miss the art of teaching when they get into that role of being the top administrator for a school. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, it is important that they remain a colleague with their other teachers in the school. We will be advocating strongly that they remain part of the ATA and that this preserves the integrity, the collegial relationship that exists. Obviously, teachers know that they report to principals. Unnecessary divisions or additional hierarchal structures I don't think are necessary.

In fact, if you look at the private sector, Mr. Speaker, you know, as a bit of a comparison, more and more companies are looking at more flat models as opposed to layers and layers of hierarchy because they're realizing very quickly that creating unnecessary divisions and layers does not necessarily bring forward greater productivity. In fact, there are a number of companies that look at that. Now, that's comparing companies to our schools. Nonetheless, we would like to see that clarification in black and white in this bill.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, the other point that I think is absolutely critical is that this new college of Alberta superintendents is made up of peers and not either appointees or hand-picked folks who

aren't educators, who don't have that background, that knowledge, that experience that's critical to this job.

5:10

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. Like I had said at the outset, I will be supporting this bill in second reading and then will continue to engage with stakeholders and, hopefully, get some more detailed information from this government and continue this debate.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was actually hoping that my new hairstyle would allow you to see me a little bit, you know, quicker, but apparently the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview caught your eye a little bit before me.

I'm honoured to stand here today and offer my support for Bill 55, the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act. I'd like to thank the Minister of Education for all the hard work she put into this bill and the consultations that have helped make this bill possible.

Now, as many in this House know by now, I'm a father of two boys, and like any parent in the province, a strong and high-quality education system is extremely important to me, and that's why I'm happy to support Bill 55. I believe it will improve the quality of our education system, which, in turn, will benefit students and school boards because of the increased accountability that this bill aims to achieve. Bill 55, the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act, will provide additional accountability to Alberta's education system by making the college a legislated professional regulatory body. By enacting this legislation, the College of Alberta School Superintendents will now be responsible for the conduct and competency of its regulatory members. This will include superintendents and deputy superintendents in the public, Catholic, or francophone school districts.

I would like to thank the College of Alberta School Superintendents for submitting this proposal to the Minister of Education in late 2019 and for engaging in the significant consultations that occurred last year, which I will talk about later on. Superintendents play an integral part and role in how our school systems operate and the quality of education that our children receive. The guidance and direction that they provide to other education leaders also improves the quality of our educational system, and these educational leaders should be held to the highest standard that is consistent across the entire province.

Now, at the moment the College of Alberta School Superintendents is voluntary and has about 320 members. Bill 55 would require that all superintendents, deputy superintendents, and some other school leaders employed by public, separate, and francophone school boards be a member of the college. By requiring mandatory membership for all superintendents and deputy superintendents and other educational leaders, a set of standards will be created that will raise the bar of excellence and quality within Alberta's education. Like how there's a set of standards for our fantastic teachers – many of my friends and family are teachers, including many of those in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain – there will now be a set of standards for superintendents and deputy superintendents.

This bill will also establish a nonregulated membership that isn't mandatory and provide the college with the bylaw-making power to establish categories of membership for nonregulated members. These nonregulated members could also include system leaders in First Nation school authorities and independent schools who wish

to join and contribute within the professional community of practice. Retired superintendents and university professors may also join as nonregulated members. Now, having a nonregulated membership for those who are not a superintendent or deputy superintendent is important because they will be a part of the professional community and be able to contribute while not being subjected to a disciplinary process. Alberta's education system will be strengthened by this professional organization, and students from kindergarten to grade 12 will benefit.

A disciplinary process within any organization is important to the credibility and quality of the organization, and while I'm sure that nearly every superintendent conducts themselves professionally, this legislation will ensure professional conduct and will instill a process that allows for a fair investigation and resolution if a complaint is made. Now, even though the disciplinary process will now be overseen by the College of Alberta School Superintendents, if this bill is passed, it is important to note that the college will still have to report to the Minister of Education and is required to provide the minister with recommendations if a certificate of practice should be suspended or cancelled.

I want to clarify something before I go any further. This legislation does not give more power to the superintendent over the school board. The school board must still be respected as the employer of the superintendent or deputy superintendent, and that is explicitly mentioned within this legislation. It's also important to mention that the college will not be able to act as a union and will not be able to engage in collective bargaining or assist in negotiating employment contracts.

I'm also happy to say that there are no additional costs associated with the proposed changes in this bill and that this bill will not come into effect until September 2022, which gives plenty of time to smoothly transition to these changes. The College of Alberta School Superintendents is expected to be self-sustaining through membership fees.

Last summer there were extensive consultations, and an online survey was distributed to superintendents and deputy superintendents, assistant and associate superintendents, directors, and other essential office staff. I'd like to thank all the stakeholders that were involved in consultations, including the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools, the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta, the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, and First Nations superintendents and educational directors. I'm happy to see that most of the feedback received after the consultations was positive, and I know that our government and especially the Minister of Education appreciate the input given by the Alberta Teachers' Association.

This legislation does not affect the roles within the Teaching Profession Act but, instead, incorporates the College of Alberta School Superintendents into the broader education system, which includes the Alberta Teachers' Association. Mr. Speaker, Bill 55 is a great act that improves Alberta's education system for the betterment of our kids. I'm proud of the terrific work that our superintendents do every day in providing top-notch educational leadership, and I know that this bill will positively affect the leadership of our educational leaders. That is why I urge everyone in this House to support this act, which will benefit our students and kids for years to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the member.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 55, College of Alberta School Superintendents Act. I would like to start by acknowledging the incredible front-line workers that are working daily to support Albertans through this pandemic. That's something that I've started as a practice here, to do an acknowledgement of our support and gratitude.

When we're talking about a pandemic and this piece of legislation, our students and our teachers and our families have been incredibly impacted and I could even go as far as to say disrupted somewhat in their learning because of the pandemic. Some incredible decisions have been made by parents on whether or not to have their child attend in person, whether or not to have their child attend online. I have a child who's a student in grade 12 who has struggled with those decisions, not feeling safe in school but also not feeling supported with mental health by not being in school. In knowing the importance of all of those working in the pandemic trying to make our children's lives as normal as possible, I just need to give a huge shout-out to all of the incredible staff and volunteers that are working in our school system across the province to help support our children during this really difficult learning time.

Today we're debating the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act, and I know that today my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora proposed an emergency debate to discuss the curriculum. Unfortunately, it was prevented by the government to have that debate. I think that while we're talking about superintendents and we're talking about schools, it begs the question as to why this minister is proposing a piece of legislation under her ministry that addresses superintendents and creating a college as opposed to what Albertans are asking for, which is support for schools, a modern curriculum. We put forward a proposal to discuss this, to debate this on an emergency basis in the Chamber this afternoon, and it wasn't seen as being important.

Now, today outside in this parking lot I and one of my colleagues were approached by a young person who just randomly expressed concern about the curriculum and specifically cited that grade 2 students are going to be expected to understand, discuss the silk trade. This was a conversation that was unprovoked. This is something that we know Albertans are talking about. We have been inundated over these last few days, since the curriculum changes were released, with concerns from indigenous leaders and from students, staff, families, grandparents.

5:20

While we're in this Chamber, with the incredible privilege to debate legislation, this government has the ability to introduce legislation that I think should be relevant and timely. When Albertans are asking to talk about the curriculum and all of their concerns, instead we're discussing Alberta school superintendents and the introduction of more bureaucracy, really, in our education system instead of focusing on what Albertans want to talk about, which is this curriculum that has been introduced that many are saying is damaging to our students. It's damaging to our young learners in the province. I can speak to the fact that when people talk to me about education in the province, whether they're a grandparent, whether they're an educator, whether they're a volunteer that works in the lunch program at a school, students, educators, they don't talk to me about building a new college for superintendents. Not right now. That's something that isn't really top of mind.

If you're talking to Albertans right now, the pandemic is top of mind and the risk that our students are in because they didn't have

the proper supports going back to school. But they're also now really concerned about the curriculum that's being proposed. I think that there are multiple levels when it comes to the concerns about the curriculum. We're putting our Alberta students at a disadvantage when it comes to learning across the entire country. I can speak to a military family's experience when they're being posted to Alberta or being posted from Alberta to another province.

One of the things that parents have as a top-of-mind concern is how their child will integrate into their next school year in their new province. So when we're talking about a college of Alberta school superintendents, I don't think that that's something that families that are considering their child's education are talking about. They want to make sure that their child that's going from perhaps grade 9 to grade 10 has a really good grasp of their learning. When they look at other provinces learning a modern curriculum and Alberta proposing the curriculum that they are, with so many concerns about appropriateness just for the age level, that's a concern.

I know that it's not just the military that move across the province with their children. There are many families that tend to relocate. They look at other job opportunities, and one of their main concerns is their children's education. We live in a country where each province gets to decide the education for their young people. For whatever reason this government is deciding to roll back our education system and put forward learning that just doesn't make sense. Why this Minister of Education is deciding to bring forward legislation that creates more bureaucracy in a college instead of actually addressing what Albertans are asking for is very concerning.

We know that Albertans are calling for funding to make sure that the 20,000 new students entering the classroom will actually have teachers. That's a concern. Making sure that their students are being properly educated in accurate history – we look at the concerns around the culture component of the curriculum. It's very confusing to me as to why we're talking about introducing a college when there are so many other things that Albertans are asking for when it comes to our education system.

Now, having been part of the Alberta College of Social Workers, I understand the importance of a professional body that governs itself. I think that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview made a very good point, that he had heard from educators or those involved in the education system that when we're looking at setting up a college, it needs to be made up of peers, peers that really understand what the Alberta school system is and having this understanding that if there is, unfortunately, a disciplinary action that needs to occur, those that are tasked with reviewing that disciplinary action really understand the whole picture. Making sure that those that are represented in the college are from the education system: I think that's a really, really fair point.

I think that when consultation is happening, those are things that make sense when we're looking at creating a college. I know that there's a risk in doing appointee positions, and the risk is that those that are in charge of running the college risk not having a clear understanding of what the work is, what the environment of the education system is. I think that that's something where we would like to hear if that's going to be part of this creation of a professional college.

The other piece is that when I look at the college that I belong to as a social worker, a big piece of that was the ethics component. When working in an ethical environment, I'm curious how this government is going to create the code of ethics for this college and what they see as the criteria for those ethics. We've seen some questionable behaviour from this government that I would argue and that many have said to me is somewhat unethical. We've seen behaviours from ministers, from this Premier that border on that.

I'm curious: who's going to be responsible for the creation of the ethics that govern this college of superintendents?

I know that when it comes to learning in this province, there's been little emphasis put on the actual learning component for our young people, our future of this province. We saw this government introduce a piece of legislation that had "early learning" in the title of the bill, and then it was never mentioned at all throughout the entire bill, which tells me and Albertans that early learning isn't something that is important. When we have a minister bringing forward legislation that doesn't seem to be timed and when there are so many other things that she should be addressing, like I mentioned, developing a modern curriculum for Albertans or funding the desperately needed supports for students with complex needs – I know that as a social worker I relied heavily on linking families up with PUF funding, and this is a government that cut that funding. That speaks to where they see the importance of early learning. Complex needs are something that our students desperately need. Our teachers and our support staff have been asking for more supports for that, and that isn't something that's being addressed in this bill or in this session. Instead, we're talking about the introduction of a college, the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

There are just so many pieces that the education system currently under this government is failing in, and why this piece of legislation was brought forward now is baffling to me. We've seen unprecedented amounts of outcry from Albertans with concern over the curriculum, and those are people that have told me that they support the UCP government. They do not support this curriculum for their children. They don't believe that this a decision that is actually in the best interest of our future, our future in terms of how they learn, what they're learning.

We know from teachers that there's an ability to teach and have the children actually retain it in a way that they can recall it rather than simply memorizing it, and this curriculum is getting away from what we know are effective learning strategies and teaching strategies and trying to look at simply retention.

5:30

Now, I know as a kid, when I was a student, there were times, definitely, where I needed to memorize something for that moment, but the classes that had the most impact on me were when the teachers made a memorable experience in the learning. I had an incredible teacher in junior high that took learning to a whole new level. She would stand on her desk to teach a concept, and there were things that we talked about in that moment that I remember now. Sometimes I can't remember what I ate for breakfast, but I can recall very clearly some of those learnings that I had experienced in junior high because of that teacher.

When we change the curriculum to a way of learning that we know is proven to not be effective, what are we doing to our children? We're not setting up future learners to accelerate in the workforce, to accelerate in postsecondary. We have a huge risk to our young people, and I think that the fact that we're in the Legislature today debating creating a college instead of really talking about what Albertans are talking about is concerning.

Now, I'm not saying that the creation of a college is a bad thing; I just don't see how this can be what the minister has identified as a priority when there are so many things that need to be addressed first, that Albertans are asking to be addressed first. They want to know that their children have adequate supports in their schools.

With that, I will close my comments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Seeing none. Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 55, the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act, which was proposed by the hon. Minister of Education. First of all, I would like to thank the minister for putting together a bill that will benefit both school boards and students throughout the province.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I am here to show my support for Bill 55. As a parent I understand how important the education system is in Alberta and believe that Bill 55 will help further improve it. This is an extremely important piece of legislation as our youth are the ones who shape the future. This legislation will greatly improve our education system, giving each and every student a chance to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, or CASS, currently has 320 members. This includes superintendents from 61 public, separate, and francophone school authorities, which make up nearly 60 per cent of First Nations school authorities, as well as 11 of 13 charter school authorities. Currently CASS is a voluntary organization, though the new proposal will require memberships for superintendents, deputy superintendents, and some school system leaders employed by public, separate, and francophone school boards. CASS will also establish classes for nonmandatory membership.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will increase efficiency and accountability within our education system. This act will help to create an extremely professional organization for school system leaders, who, in turn, will strengthen education from kindergarten through grade 12 for all students. Superintendents play a crucial role in making sure our students receive high-quality education as do parents, teachers, and trustees, who are all part of the same system. This act will hold education system leaders accountable, which is something that Albertan parents and students both want and deserve. We believe that superintendents play a vital role in our students receiving top-quality education, and this act makes that clear.

One thing that is important to note to Albertans is that CASS will not be involved in any contract negotiations. They will also not play a union function for superintendents, which is something we want to be made very clear.

Mr. Speaker, last year members of our government spoke to our education partners about ways we can improve how our education leaders are governed. We realized, as a result of this, that changes needed to be made in order to help build an education system that is full of professional leaders that will provide even better outcomes for students throughout Alberta.

This act has been well thought out. During the summer of 2020 the Department of Education discussed this proposal with CASS. This discussion included an online survey for the superintendents, deputy superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors, and other central office staff as well as face-to-face meetings with CASS and many other affected stakeholder groups. Mr. Speaker, after all this research was completed, it was concluded that the vast majority of those consulted thought it was beneficial to both themselves and the education system for CASS to become a legislated organization.

Mr. Speaker, the amount of positive feedback we have gotten in this regard is the reason I believe that this is such a great act. This will have significant positive impacts on our students moving forward. If this act is passed, CASS will become a regulated professional organization, which will strengthen the leadership of schools at the highest level. This will ensure that both students and the school system will be supported through improved accountability and leadership excellence moving forward.

In order to ensure that CASS is keeping up to standards, they will be submitting an annual report to the Legislature. The annual

reports will ensure that both appropriate oversight and public accountability are in place. This way we are able to make sure that the standards have been met and our students are receiving the education they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, if this bill does in fact get passed, the proclamation date of the act is scheduled for 2022. This gives time for the department to continue working with CASS as they focus on transitioning to a regulatory body and are able to continue discussing ways to improve the education system.

Of course, with changes like this, many are wondering what the cost will be. We understand that given the current COVID-19 pandemic along with the economic recession, finances are tough right now for many Albertans. Our government is pleased to report that there will be no new costs associated with this proposal. Along with that, CASS is expected to be self-sustaining through membership fees. This means that CASS will not require government funding through the transition period.

Mr. Speaker, while the act will enhance how the education system leaders are held accountable, we are making sure that we will not place any unnecessary barriers or rules in place. While our goal is to make the education system better, we want to work with our school leaders. This government believes that the changes being proposed are important to ensure the best oversight of our school leaders.

Mr. Speaker, the mission to put the act in place began back in 2019, when CASS had first submitted a proposal to be recognized through legislation. I am very proud of our government for moving forward with this and for all the work they have done to make it possible.

These types of changes that we are proposing are nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario also currently have professional organizations of teacher leaders to ensure that they're maintaining a high standard. It also helps them to ensure that these regulated members are both skilled and competent in their professional practice, which we need to make sure is the case here in Alberta as well. With these changes we understand that some of our superintendents and other members may require professional development. CASS will be responsible for helping these particular members out, ensuring that they're a hundred per cent capable of giving our youth the best education possible.

5:40

Another extremely important role that CASS will have is overseeing the professional discipline of its regulated members. While we hope it never happens, there is always a chance that somewhere down the line there are cases of unprofessional conduct. If there are any complaints filed, CASS will have the tools they need to deal with such complaints the best way they see fit. In doing this, the structure will be very similar to that of other legislated structures in Alberta, especially the practice review of teachers and teacher leaders regulation, both of which we believe the current system works very well for.

Mr. Speaker, the act is a crucial step in improving the education system in Alberta and something I believe strongly in. I'm very proud of my colleagues for putting this terrific act together and extremely proud to be speaking on it today. CASS's mission is to provide leadership, expertise, and advocacy to improve, promote, and champion student success. I think we can all agree that is something that is extremely important for both our students and officials of the great province.

My hope is that everyone will show support for this act as it will be very beneficial for the education sector. Our youth deserve the best, and this is going to give them just that, providing them all the tools they need to be successful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Member for Calgary-East.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure once again to rise in the House to speak on Bill 55, College of Alberta School Superintendents Act. I want to start my comments, actually, recognizing the teachers, through you. Mr. Joe Mackenzie, who had been teaching my son's class of CLS up until the very difficult experience of the COVID-19 pandemic last year. With what happened – the public health orders and a number of government decisions and the situation, safety measures, changes in the school operations, and moving the classes to online – Mr. Mackenzie could not, you know, keep his class after the fall of 2020.

I also wanted to recognize and thank, through you, Ms Tara Harington. She is taking over the CLS class, my son's class, actually, right now, substituting the sum of the work that was being done by Mr. Joe Mackenzie. I actually did recognize her work, our challenges somewhere in the last session, but then I went back and spoke with her and wanted to get her consent that I can, you know, speak her name on the record.

The reason I wanted to recognize: I wanted to share a little experience around that. Tara is teaching this CLS class online and handling the children with disabilities with four different levels due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges and changes to the school operations that we have. My son is in the last year. She has children from grades 9, 10, 11, 12 and a different level of their, you know, education gradings with very little support. "A little support" I'm saying because she still has access to the Internet; she still has access to the computers. I don't exactly know what access because I see that every time we have my son joining the class, I don't find really a support. That's where it encourages me to just get up, intervene, and speak with her.

On the other hand, I also wanted to recognize the parents, specifically the parents of young children and the parents of special-needs children. Those students have so much difficulty actually operating the computers independently, understanding the topics. I know a number of parents right now staying home, not going to work, and even those parents: further impacts and challenges on them. The parents from Albertan racialized communities also probably, you know, need lots of support in a number of ways to address a number of challenges, understanding the language, helping the students to learn and respond.

That was, you know, one of the challenges, that I have been witnessing personally, that needed support from our government: the support for schools, the support for teachers, and the support for families. That is where we exactly saw and we keep witnessing the government's struggle to come up with a strong mind and make a decision and help those individuals and help the school system. We hear from our constituents every day over the phones, via e-mails and in-person meetings, maintaining the public health orders as much as possible. We try to co-ordinate with this.

Interestingly, I just wanted to share the feedback even from a 10-year-old student, what they're looking for, their priority and their concern. What has happened in the past few years is classroom capacity. This was the reply and the feedback during my Zoom meeting with the grade 6 class when I asked: "What feedback do you want me to take back? This is my job." That was the question put by the grade 6 student: "My classroom is more congested. Our desks are being more squished in, and we are too many people, and

sometimes we don't get turns to participate and speak on the topics we wanted to share."

5:50

This was kind of the feedback that we are hearing from our constituents when we are saying: 20,000 more students, and definitely the government needed to make sure that every new student coming to or joining the schools has the teachers. But that has been compromised. A number of times we speak on bills, and we have our own approach and different visions, and I tried the refrain every time that it doesn't look like this is just, you know, the opposition's partisan debate, but there are common issues. I do not expect, if you go back somewhere in the Calgary school district, you will not get the same feedback around the classroom capacities, teachers, support staff that I'm seeing from my own constituency in Edmonton-Meadows.

I have asked this question actually during the supplementary supply to the Infrastructure minister, to the Education minister. I was surprised to see that the school being announced for so long still doesn't have very clear information in year 2021, that was announced and that was on the priority list in 2019. Not only that; in also one of the largest school board districts in the province, I didn't really see even a single new school coming from Budget 2021.

Those are the challenges, those are the questions that are being put forward, and that's kind of the advocacy that families, parents, students, teachers are actually doing in the province. That was something that really needed to be taken seriously by this government, and that was something that we would have been more than happy to discuss in the House, and that is something that – the opposition is always willing to help the government around these topics. Unfortunately, we are not seeing any progress towards these issues at all.

I wanted to speak a little bit around CASS as I have a number of questions actually regarding the school system. We will support this in second reading, creating a professional college for educational superintendents and deputy superintendents employed in public and separate or francophone school authorities. Something I was hearing from the Member for Calgary-East: I would probably like to know more detail on it, where the members who – I can't remember the number of regulators, but 1,300 people will not be paying fees. This will be a self-sustainable institution or body that will be run by the membership fees. That was something really concerning to me, what exactly the government is trying to address by not focusing on some of the important issues and diverting

attention towards this very bureaucratic issue within the school system that no one really, actually demanded or advocated for. What are the funding models? I don't know. That's the question. The minister can really expand on it and how this will be able to hold their ongoing operations.

The other thing: how the committee will be constituted. Is this bill – the committee will be appointed by the government, or will it be elected by the members? If this committee will constitute the expertise and will be the peers of experts in the area, the other question that I had in my mind was: what is their role in the disciplinary matters, where the committee can hold the investigation but would not have the authority to act on it?

These are some of the concerns directly related to this bill. The ministry can really expand on it and provide details about it. There have been incredibly important, hot topics among Alberta's public, and I would really like to see the government focus on those.

With these comments I would like to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to stand under 29(2)(a) and comment a little bit on the remarks made by the previous speaker from our caucus. I know that this piece of legislation, Bill 55, College of Alberta School Superintendents Act, attempts to respond to some who are calling for a change to the system where the Minister of Education brings in reforms allowing different reorganizations to take place within the school system and superintendents' designations.

However, what it doesn't do is deal with what 30,000 Albertans are telling us, and that is to pay attention to things that are really mattering to them. What's really mattering to them, Mr. Speaker, are the severe deficiencies in the proposed curriculum that the current Minister of Education is embroiled in right now, which has got the backs up of thousands of Albertans who are really in disbelief at the proposal that is going to be taking us backwards at a time when we need to be preparing students for the future in a world that's changing rapidly, yet what we look at now is a curriculum that is really taking all the time of the Minister of Education, that should be focusing on the future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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