



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 7, 2021

Day 93

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 7, 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 interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Member's Fifth Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed with the afternoon Routine, I would like to acknowledge the fifth anniversary of the election of a member to this Assembly. I would like to ask the hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to please join me here at the dais. Many of you will know that the hon. member served a three-year term and then today marks the five-year anniversary, so it's my sincere pleasure to commend the hon. associate minister on his election as the MLA for Calgary-Foothills and to congratulate you on reaching this milestone as well as your dedication to your service and your constituents. In the name of keeping all protocols, I invite you to grab your pin, and congratulations.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has a statement to make.

Environmental Policies

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there are no people who respect the need to balance economic activity with environmental protection more than the people of beautiful Banff-Kananaskis. Aside from being a low-tax, low-regulation place for business, Alberta's Rocky Mountains have always made our province a uniquely attractive destination for both business and tourism investment. Companies know that doing business in Alberta will guarantee their employees a high quality of life full of recreational opportunities in the great outdoors.

That's why I am so proud of our government's work to strengthen Alberta's economy by investing in the conservation of our environment. We have spent over \$10 million to conserve 55,000 acres of sensitive land, invested \$15 million into Kananaskis Country, formed over 170 comanagement partnerships with not-for-profits in our provincial parks, hired over 20 conservation officers to protect our eastern slopes, and doubled a provincial park in northeast Alberta to become the largest area of protected boreal forest in the world. And recently we announced that we would be transitioning Alberta to a circular economy to reduce waste in Alberta landfills by shifting the cost and management of recycling off municipal taxpayers and onto the private companies who produce and consume these goods, ensuring that materials such as paper and plastics are reused, recycled, and remanufactured in Alberta, not dumped in a landfill.

Not only is this exciting news for people like me, who meticulously clean our sour cream containers for recycling and do our laundry with wooly dryer balls instead of dryer sheets, but this is expected to grow recycling into a \$148 million industry in Alberta and reduce our emissions by the equivalent of 120,000 cars every single year. On top of it all, our government also is establishing an environmental, social, and governance secretariat, who will help our energy producers continue their world-leading production and environmental standards while making sure that global investors know just how environmentally conscious we are. In two short years, Mr. Speaker, our government has invested an unprecedented amount into conservation of our environment, and that is a legacy that I am proud of.

COVID-19 Response

Ms Phillips: A year into COVID-19, Albertans are witnessing some of the most regrettable leadership by a Premier in Canadian history, with mass unemployment and loss of public confidence in UCP decisions. For a year the Premier could have taken concrete action to help workers and the businesses they work for. He could have provided paid sick leave. He didn't, so sick people make the choice – they have no choice but to go to work. The result? Predictable: increased community spread, suffering, economic insecurity. The Premier could have supported small businesses and their workers with simple stuff like commercial rent support or extra support for the hardest hit. But nothing. No wonder people are angry. And now, again, the Premier asks people to respond to a crisis that he created, with no help for them to do so.

The UCP has created a false choice between on the one hand so-called business as usual, which will create an overwhelmed health care system, and on the other hand robbing people of their economic security with zero notice. We don't get any support for people, but we have seen appeasement of a far-right fringe of the UCP caucus coddling their sometimes dangerous statements and actions, like just yesterday from the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka.

With the loss of moral authority evident, the Premier has a real crisis on his hands. There's a political crisis, to be sure. That's the only set of problems he seems to care about, but the political crisis is broader than his conspiracy caucus revolt. It is that no one of almost any background trusts him anymore.

He has a health and economic crisis as well. Our economy is the weakest in many, many decades. Instead, the Premier has fed his pet polarization projects: grievance, conspiracy, far-right fundamentalism in the school curriculum. Those things don't inspire confidence to create jobs here.

We are going to further overwhelm our health care system and stymie our economic recovery without an appropriate COVID-19 response. This is a vicious circle of suffering because the Premier's arrogance and empathy stopped him from doing the right thing at every opportunity.

Holocaust Remembrance Day

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, to acknowledge one of the darkest chapters in human history. Millions of Jews and other targeted groups were persecuted and murdered based on their race, religion, level of physical or mental ability, or sexual orientation. The hatred and cruelty of the Nazi perpetrators and the pain and suffering of the 6 million plus victims must never be forgotten.

Today we remember the families that were torn apart by this terrible crime: so many murdered, others never reunited, my own family one of those deeply affected by the extermination of all

known relatives in wartime Poland. We remember the inhumanity of the exterminations and institutionalized cruelty of the concentration labour camps. Remembering is painful.

No matter our connection to the Holocaust, the emotions are powerful, a reminder of the family history and heritage lost and the lives and bloodlines that will never be. These stories bring feelings of heartbreak, grief, and, yes, anger. It's in this pain that we find purpose from the importance of sharing the stories of the victims and survivors.

Anti-Semitism and hatred are, sadly, alive around the world and right here in Alberta. As Albertans we must stay vigilant and defend the rights and freedoms that were won at such a high cost, and amidst the tales of tragedy we must find inspiration in the stories of those who fought back, those who helped others flee, hid those in danger, participated in the resistance, or fought in the war. Actions of bravery shine bright amidst the profound darkness which surrounded them, but every one of us has the power, indeed the responsibility to fight anti-Semitism and other acts of discrimination, hatred, and intolerance. Such acts must never be left unchallenged, and to stand idly by is to be complicit if we truly value our hard-fought freedoms and our diversity in a tolerant and respectful society.

We must all stand together to fight against the hatred that attacks our humanity, our principles, and the fabric of a just world. On Yom ha-Shoah we will remember, and we must never forget. Shalom, Mr. Speaker. [Remarks in Hebrew]

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Member Irwin: Teachers, students, parents, grandparents, babies: these were just some of the folks who I met rallying yesterday in Calgary to reject the UCP's regressive curriculum. This government can try to dismiss our concerns as the opposition, but it's getting harder and harder for them to ignore the pleas of tens of thousands of Albertans. People are fired up because they care, because this is about what's best for kids. Since this government, I'm sure, will claim that they've only gotten seven or so e-mails on this topic, allow me to share with you just the tiniest fraction of what we've heard.

Rebecca from Spruce Grove: this curriculum is "an attack on Alberta's teachers, Alberta's children and will have devastating far reaching effects for generations to come."

Joclyn from Sherwood Park: you can teach all the facts in the world, but if you don't build curiosity and creativity, you're not engaging learners or promoting lifelong learning.

Joshua from Falher: "in a time where students are often challenged with finding relevance in our current curriculum, this new one is completely irrelevant."

Carla from Calgary: "the vast majority of students who speak English as a second language, have learning disabilities, or neurodivergences will be left behind."

Mosey, from Edmonton, notes that a successful curriculum looks like "a young indigenous student still living the effects of intergenerational trauma being able to believe that school is a welcoming place where she belongs, and where there is evidence of Truth and Reconciliation in every grade level."

Premier, these are real Albertans with personal connections to the curriculum. These are folks with genuine concerns. They must be heard. They will keep demanding better from their government because our kids deserve a modern, evidence-based curriculum, and we won't accept ever that they deserve anything less.

The Speaker: The Member for Livingstone-Macleod, please.

1:40

Mental Health

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This pandemic and the public health restrictions have had negative impacts on the mental health of many Albertans. This is scary because mental illness can often be difficult to notice. Men are much more likely to hide their mental health issues for fear that they may be viewed as weak or unmanly. These fears are stronger among rural Albertan men, especially if they are in the trades or farmers. But acknowledging your mental health concerns does not make you weak. Mental illness can affect the most hardened roughneck or the most stoic of farmers, and although mental illness is often hidden beneath the surface and may seem inconsequential compared to the other stresses of the day, untreated mental illness can have dangerous results.

We can see this through the disturbing trend of family violence and addiction issues that have increased since the pandemic began. And, Mr. Speaker, there are certain professions where the mental health concerns are less apparent but even more impactful such as in farming. According to a 2016 study by the University of Guelph, quote: farmers face higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and a higher risk of burnout than the general population. Unquote. Farmers face a tremendous amount of uncertainty due to the weather and many other factors, and they often experience long periods of isolation during many parts of the year. I've seen it in my own experience with my own dad, seeing the lights of his combine in the middle of a dark field as he worked late to finish the harvest. Farming is an essential and deeply respectable occupation, but it can also be a very lonely one, and this pandemic along with the public health restrictions have made it even more difficult.

Mr. Speaker, I urge everyone in this House and across Alberta to please pay attention to your mental health and to the mental health of others. Please know that you are not alone and that there are fantastic resources available if you struggle with mental illness or addiction. And let's be kind to one another because we never know if someone is quietly going through their own mental hell.

Thank you.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned about the further impacts that reckless cuts by this UCP government have had on our postsecondary institutions. At a virtual town hall the University of Calgary's president, Ed McCauley, made it clear that his university's budget has been cut by 18 per cent since 2019, resulting in the loss of 550 jobs and 200 initiatives at the University of Calgary alone. These cuts are in addition to the devastating cuts we saw at the University of Alberta and other institutions. We know that last year the U of A expected to eliminate 650 jobs by 2022, a number that will increase with additional cuts that we're seeing from this UCP government.

These layoffs are devastating to the families of employees and will force them to look for jobs at a very difficult time. A loss of 550 employees is also a loss to the students at the U of C, to the city of Calgary, and to the province as a whole. Their work was important to the student experience and supporting projects that were having an impact on creating new economic opportunities. Their contributions were important, and their loss will be felt deeply at the University of Calgary.

The U of C Students' Union president, Frank Finley, recently warned that this reckless approach can also lead to a brain drain, with more and more of our most talented and best educated young people leaving the province of Alberta. We can simply not afford

to do this. It'll cost us much more long term than the minister could ever save in the short term, and we know that this could only get worse. We know that the government is looking for further cuts; for example, by implementing performance-based funding models. We know what this will mean: further job losses, reduction in services, and more costs downloaded to students. At a time when the minister should focus most on creating new opportunities and creating the best experience for our future leaders, this minister has simply added to the unemployment line and reducing job opportunities in Alberta.

The Speaker: The Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Northeastern Alberta Youth Achievements

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is filled with intelligent, talented youth, and I want to shine a light on three amazing young women we have in northeastern Alberta. This March Aarushi Vasal, a grade 9 student at Westwood high school in Fort McMurray, received a national gold medal from the Royal Conservatory of Music for her music and speech arts examination. She had to compete with hundreds of other students from all across Canada. During her exam Aarushi presented a scene from a Shakespearean play, performed a monologue, recited poetry, and gave a self-written speech.

Last year another young woman from my area made headlines when she was cast as Tiger Lily in the upcoming film *Peter Pan & Wendy*. In 2019 Alyssa Wapanatâhk was selected for a \$20,000 grant to create a short film as part of the first indigenous storyteller edition of the Telus-funded program Storyhive, and then she wrote, produced, and directed a short film called *The Boy and the Braid*, exploring the experiences indigenous boys face growing up in today's society.

Recently a grade 12 student at l'école McTavish school was the very first Canadian to win the breakthrough junior achievement challenge. This international competition challenges youth to bring their creative talents to science by making a short video on life sciences, physics, or a math concept. Seventeen-year-old Maryam Tsegaye rose to the top, beating 5,600 applicants and 30 semifinalists. She was awarded a \$250,000 U.S. scholarship, \$100,000 for her school's science lab, and \$50,000 for her teacher. But she wasn't in it for the reward. In Maryam's own words, she said: I did it for the sake of the challenge and the fun of it.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, there is absolutely no shortage of youth talent in northeastern Alberta. I am so proud of the accomplishments of these young ladies.

Support for Military Personnel, Families, and Veterans

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, when we were in government, I was honoured when the Premier approached me to be the military liaison for the government, the first woman in Canada to hold that position and the first NDP representative in Alberta. As the military liaison I worked with regular and reserve force members, veterans, and families to ensure that they were supported by the provincial government, and together we made real, meaningful changes.

The reality of military life is that they frequently move, taking their children and spouses with them. This means changing schools, changing doctors, changing careers. To address these issues, we created a crossministerial working group along with regular and reserve force members, veterans, and families to find out what supports were needed. We also created a working group with all Alberta military family resource centres and the Lieutenant Governor.

Coming from all this work, Alberta took the lead in seamless Canada, a national initiative to assist families in transitioning from province to province. We opened the Veterans Service Centre, which provides housing and wraparound services for homeless veterans. We stood with the military and legislated Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Day. We increased access to PTSD service dogs for the military and first responders under the Service Dogs Act and added agencies to train these dogs, increasing the annual availability from 20 animals per year to 170. We worked to improve access to health services in French for our francophone military community and created a dedicated web page for military families and veterans in both English and French.

Mr. Speaker, appreciation for the sacrifices made by our Canadian Armed Forces members, whether current, veterans, or families, cannot be understated. This would be especially appreciated now since April is the Month of the Military Child. I am proud of the work the NDP did, I am proud to continue as the military liaison for the NDP caucus, and I know the Alberta NDP and our leader will always stand by the Canadian Armed Forces.

Alberta in Canada

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, now more than ever we must stand up to the unfair treatment Alberta has experienced for decades. We must speak of a fair deal for Alberta. It is about just that, securing a fair deal in Canada and advancing our vital economic interests. Albertans are always prepared to do the heavy lifting, and we are proud to continue helping Canada flourish, but we need to be treated fairly.

Mr. Speaker, I was baffled last April, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood in front of media and announced to Canadians that his government was increasing the carbon tax by 33 per cent. The increase from \$20 to \$30 per tonne of carbon emissions put an untold stress on farmers, small-business owners, and grocers, and they are planning to increase it again by \$10. When Justin Trudeau ran for Prime Minister in 2015, he told Canadians that his environmental agenda, namely his carbon tax, would grant social licence to energy products and make it easier for producers to get their products to market. The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association pleaded with the government to delay the increase. Families are struggling enough as it is, and the last thing they need is an increased tax. But, as usual, they did not listen. We need a federal government that will fight for Albertans and all Canadians. We need a fair deal.

What does a fair deal look like for Alberta? It looks like Ottawa standing up for the lives and livelihoods of all Albertans. It looks like receiving fair funding allocations from Ottawa, better representation for Alberta in the House of Commons, and supporting Albertan oil and gas instead of importing from foreign sources. The Prime Minister's inaction on the cancellation of Keystone XL by the Biden administration has called into question his entire environmental and energy agenda while threatening the livelihoods of thousands of Albertans and Canadians. Ottawa needs to step up.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Case Increase and Response

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two thousand Albertans lost to COVID-19: in the flurry of news yesterday our province crossed

a tragic milestone. Our hearts are with their families. We owe it to them and to all Albertans to do everything we can to stop this virus. But while the restrictions announced yesterday were necessary, the Premier spent weeks telling Albertans that he would never do it, that he'd never go back to step 1. The writing was on the wall, yet he refused to plan for this possibility, and now Albertans are paying for it. Premier, why did your announcement yesterday include zero new supports for businesses and for workers?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, most of what the Leader of the Opposition just said is false and untrue. I was clear in the last week of January, when we launched the path forward, that if we saw exponential growth return in a way that could threaten our health care system, we would step in with additional targeted measures to protect public health and to protect people's lives. That's what we did yesterday. In the announcement yesterday we did announce that there will be additional support for businesses affected by these measures. The details will be announced in the very near future.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta business owners and Alberta employees are still waiting on programs announced months ago. They can't afford to wait even longer.

Now, building the public trust necessary for health measures requires strong leadership. Instead, what we have are 15 government MLAs raging against them. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is telling Albertans that health officials are spreading fear. This sows mistrust, and it's going to make this last even longer. If the Premier is going to ask Albertans to comply with health orders and show leadership that even he cannot, why won't he at least give them supports while doing it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we have distributed over half a billion dollars in cash support to Alberta businesses just in the small business relaunch grants but billions of dollars of other support through things like WCB premiums, tax abatements, and so much more.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to MLAs who have stated their position, in this province we believe in freedom of speech. We believe in democracy. Well, at least the Conservative Party does. I know the NDP does not tolerate any variance of opinion, but this government does.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, instead of preparing for the inevitable reimposition of restrictions, this Premier has been distracted by the so-called free speech within his caucus, which is all about rejecting and undermining public health rules. Albertans deserve a government that respects science, that respects the law, that supports public health. Instead, they've been fighting amongst themselves, and they haven't been doing the work that Albertans expect, which is preparing with actual programs and actual cheques to workers. Why haven't you done the job?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it says all you need to know about the NDP, that they regard the fundamental constitutional right of freedom of speech as a, quote, so-called right, with scare quotes around it. This government has acted to protect lives, to protect our health care system but also to minimize the negative damage of restrictions on the broader health of our society, something which the NDP refuses to acknowledge. They are the lockdown party. They wanted us in a hard lockdown from day one. They wanted the schools shut, most businesses shut. Thank goodness they're not in government. [interjections]

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition is the one with the call.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's caucus's rejection of science is going to undermine public health orders and put Albertans at risk.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Ms Notley: Speaking of science, let's talk about this curriculum. Treaty 6 chiefs say that it furthers systemic racism. Educational experts say that it isn't age appropriate. Tens of thousands of Alberta parents are organizing against it. The draft is such a mess that several school boards are refusing to pilot it. Yesterday, when asked about this, the Education minister stated that if they didn't pilot, they won't get to give their feedback. Why is the Premier punishing school boards for not experimenting on kids with a broken curriculum?

Mr. Kenney: First, I have to respond to the leader's absurd preamble, Mr. Speaker. There is no member of the government caucus calling on people to violate the law or to engage in civil disobedience. There are members of the government caucus who have different views on the best way to address the pandemic in policy. If elected representatives cannot speak their minds about matters of policy, then what are they elected to do?

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the curriculum, I am proud to see a wide spectrum of experts, parents, and others endorsing this knowledge-focused curriculum.

Ms Notley: Government caucus members are elected to follow and support the law.

Here's the Medicine Hat public school board announcing their decision not to pilot the curriculum:

We do not support the curriculum as presented, as it would set back Alberta's world-class education system in a manner damaging to the learning and wellbeing of our students.

While we will not pilot [it], we are committed to working with Alberta Education to support its review . . . and will provide our feedback as soon as we are able.

Can the Premier commit to this board that notwithstanding what his Education minister said, they will be allowed to provide feedback and that they will not be punished?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the only person in this place who is obsessed with words like "punishment" is the leader of the NDP. We have issued a draft curriculum after – you know, when the NDP was writing its ideological curriculum, they kept secret the names of the so-called experts that were writing it. They were afraid of the sunlight of transparency. We committed to Albertans to do this in an open and transparent way, to consult not just unions but also parents. We've done that, and now we'll take onboard advice, constructive criticism from all manner of stakeholders.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I asked this question yesterday, and perhaps the Premier will answer it today. Last week he said that the curriculum had, quote, widespread support. Since then, the following school boards have said that they won't pilot it in their schools: Edmonton public, Edmonton Catholic, St. Albert public, Elk Island, Wild Rose, Medicine Hat public. Meanwhile Treaty 6, the Métis Nation of Alberta, and francophone Alberta have all condemned it. Does the Premier honestly still claim that there's widespread support? If not, will he withdraw that comment, apologize to Albertans, and withdraw his curriculum? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, not only do I retain that position, but I am proud that this will be the first curriculum in Alberta history

with significant content about the history of black people in Alberta, about indigenous history in Alberta. But, most importantly, this is a curriculum that turns away from the failures of discovery math, that saw 20 years of declining results for Alberta students, falling behind the rest of the world, by getting back to tried, true, and tested teaching methods in math instruction.

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

School COVID-19 Response

Ms Hoffman: Last spring the government raced to close schools to prevent the spread of COVID-19. That move sent families into chaos and impacted student learning. The government had five months to prepare for a September reopening and chose to do nothing. As a result, students have been isolating over and over again. Some schools have had to close altogether. To the Premier: why hasn't the government learned from its mistakes, and why are you continuing to put kids, staff, families, and communities at risk?

Mr. Kenney: With respect, Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid I had some difficulty hearing the question. This government, of course, is committed to the safety of our schools. In fact, 83 per cent of Alberta's schools are operating without COVID outbreaks. We've seen only 358 demonstrated cases of in-school transmission. As Dr. Hinshaw has said, there is very little evidence of in-school transmission, and the cost of shutting down the schools would be disastrous for kids and their life chances, particularly for children from disadvantaged families. That's why we support the continued operation of in-classroom instruction.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the government did nothing to make schools safe. They keep telling parents everything is fine, but clearly it's not. Now we have more than 400 schools with COVID-19 cases. One school has 97. That's 97 in a single school, Premier. To the Premier. Parents are living the reality of being forced to stay home over and over again with the kids. They're worried about them being infected. Why didn't Tuesday's announcement of public health orders include any new supports to make schools safer? What is the current government waiting for?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that by now the member would understand what Dr. Hinshaw has been trying to convey for the last year, which is that transmission in the school-age population is generally the result of and a reflection of community transmission, not in-school transmission. We know, for example, of the case of a high school in Calgary that had to suspend in-classroom instruction not because of in-school transmission but because of house parties. So we could do what the NDP wants and shut down the schools, and – guess what? – teenagers will continue to congregate; transmission will continue to happen. We're operating the schools as safely as we possibly can under these circumstances.

Ms Hoffman: We proposed capping class sizes, hiring more staff, having dedicated contact tracers, rapid testing for school staff. [interjections] It's not a laughing matter. The current government refused to act to make schools safer and stop the spread of COVID. Other jurisdictions have shown leadership while the Premier sat on his hands and claimed that kids don't get COVID. News flash, Premier: they do get COVID, and they certainly get the more contagious and more dangerous variant strains that we're all so worried about. To the Premier: is this really the best job that could

have been done to protect kids? It feels like you're failing Alberta families.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, why would the member feel it necessary to put words in my mouth that I've never uttered? I've never said that kids don't get COVID; I've said that there are relatively very few cases of in-school transmission. Out of 720,000 students we have at most a few hundred proven cases of in-school transmission. There is a designated contact tracing team for the schools – as the Minister of Education will confirm, that expert investigatory team has been turning around cases within 24 hours – and there also is the rollout of rapid testing in dozens of schools across the province.

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

Government Members' Remarks on COVID-19

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The third wave of the pandemic poses a great risk to Albertans. Hundreds are getting sick each day, many with the more dangerous and more contagious variant strains of COVID-19. More than 1,000 Albertans will end up in hospital according to the Premier himself, yet the Premier's own caucus members continue to downplay and misrepresent these very real risks. The MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka said in an e-mail that he doesn't know how to win the fight against public health orders. He said that officials were obsessed with fear. Premier, the real fear is that people will die because you can't keep your MLAs in line. Will the Premier kick him out of his caucus, send a message that the myths he's spreading will not be tolerated?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government announced important measures to ensure that we protect our health care system, lives from the . . . [interjections] The NDP leader: I can't even hear her heckling. All I know is that they continue to disrespect this place while this government continues to act in order to protect lives but also livelihoods.

With respect to MLAs the notion that members' speaking to government policy jeopardizes people's lives is absurd and insulting.

Mr. Shepherd: What's absurd, Mr. Speaker, is the Member for Drumheller-Stettler joining this crusade against the health of Albertans by writing on social media this morning that he doesn't support the public health measures. Two thousand Albertans have died. The Premier's own caucus: they're focused on undermining public health measures, so perhaps hundreds more will, too. Instead of condemning his own members, this Premier turns to Albertans and blames them for the drastic rise in cases we've seen in recent days. To the Premier: why doesn't he admit that the blame lies with himself and his caucus members, who are supposed to be leaders in the community but instead are actively undermining the very rules we need to keep people alive?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I sometimes think that the NDP's favourite word is "blame." All they're interested in is blame. No one is to blame for COVID. It is a reality. It is a contagious virus with which we are all contending. It's placed enormous stress on people's lives. Most people are doing their best to stay safe and to follow the guidelines. Not everybody is, because of COVID fatigue, and that is why . . . [interjections] Instead of shouting at people, why doesn't the NDP join us in calling on Albertans to do their best for the next few weeks as we get through this? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, we have been supporting Albertans while this Premier has been absent. The MLA for Airdrie-East also joined in the campaign, jumping on social media to tell those already campaigning against public health, "Please do not lose hope, you are not alone in this fight." You know who needs help? Our health care workers and public health officers, our doctors who gathered in Calgary today to warn that hospitals are going to be overwhelmed in a matter of weeks, even with new restrictions. To the Premier. They put their lives on the line for a year. They face their toughest challenge today. Explain to them why your MLAs seem set on sending even more people to hospital with dangerous myths and rhetoric about COVID-19 after it's killed 2,000 people.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the tremendous response of Albertans to this historic challenge, we as a province have done well in rising to the challenge. While we mourn the loss of 2,000 lives, we also note that the per capita fatality rate in Alberta from COVID-19 is substantially below that of the national averages of the United States and of Europe. But the alternative policy that the NDP supports is a permanent hard lockdown, that would be devastating to people's lives. Thank goodness they're not there to inflict that on people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Economic Recovery and Diversification

Ms Rosin: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is uniquely positioned for economic relaunch thanks to our experienced and entrepreneurial people, who I've always said are our best natural resource. That's why Budget 2021 contained measures to not only help our economy rebound but to grow and diversify it: \$50 million for film, \$30 million for tech, \$166 million for innovation, \$22 million for tourism, \$500 million for growing other sectors like pharmaceuticals, and more. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation please tell this House more about our government's plan to diversify Alberta's economy?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. Our recovery plan is the largest diversification effort of my lifetime. When it comes to a couple of the items that they've hit on, film and television, for example, we're off to our best year on record. We actually have private-sector investment going into film studios right now in Calgary, and many of them want to shoot in the beautiful constituency of Banff-Kananaskis. When it comes to tourism, we want to have that rebound in tourism as fast as humanly possible. That's why we put an additional 50 per cent into Travel Alberta in this budget, because we want to get people back in this province once it's safe to travel and have them enjoy our beautiful outdoors.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Well, given that countries around the world have endured a global economic crash over the past year but that news outlets, major banks, and even the Conference Board of Canada have been reporting good-news announcements about our province's economy, including almost daily private-sector announcements and announcements that we are going to lead the nation in both GDP and employment growth this year, can the same minister please highlight some of these good-news announcements for us?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, they're right to point out that Alberta is set to lead the country in GDP growth and job growth right now, in 2021. We're seeing the baseline of our economy: when it comes to commodities around oil and gas, the forestry and lumber sector and, as well, agriculture, all the foundational elements are there, having a good year in 2021. We're looking forward to that continued success. We also have a whole bunch of other areas of our economy growing rapidly. The tech sector: their venture capital record in 2020 was again doubling, 100 per cent growth in venture capital, where the rest of the country went down 30 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again, Minister. Well, given that Alberta entrepreneurs have potentially world-altering innovative ideas but often lack the capital necessary to bring those inspirations to market and given that many of those same innovators may also struggle to network during these times and raise funds either because of challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic or by being a relatively new entrepreneur, could the minister also tell Albertan innovators just about what government grants and programs exist that could open up any opportunities for them for venture capital investment?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer we launched the Innovation Capital Working Group to give us advice as to how we could accelerate the growth of our emerging technology sector. Two items they highlighted for us. One, access to venture capital, so we put an additional \$175 million into the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. That's going to help us long term attract that venture capital. The other part of it, research and development, so we put in place the innovation employment grant, again, one of the best possible employment grants to encourage research and development in the entire country. That's the foundation for us to build for the future.

2:10 Cross Cancer Institute COVID-19 Outbreak

Ms Gray: Two days ago an outbreak was declared at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton. Workers have tested positive, and tragically one patient lost their life. In January medical director Dr. Charles Butts wrote to AHS to express his frustration that unlike other cancer facilities, the staff at the Cross Cancer Institute had not been vaccinated in phase 1A. Dr. Butts warned that a COVID outbreak at the Cross Cancer Institute impacting the staff would jeopardize the delivery of vital cancer care. Can the Minister of Health explain why Dr. Butts' warnings were ignored and why the staff at Cross Cancer weren't vaccinated prior to this outbreak?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, let me say that we would like every Albertan, including those in the cancer centre that is mentioned by the hon. member, to be vaccinated today. The difficulty is that we have not been receiving, for the last three months, the vaccines that we were promised by the federal government. That means we have to be deferential to the medical advice that we're receiving not just from Dr. Hinshaw but, as well, the vaccine advisory committee, made up of physicians who are advising Dr. Hinshaw and trying to find alignment with other

provinces and also getting advice from the NACI, the National Advisory Committee on Immunizations.

Ms Gray: Given that the physicians who signed this petition stated that excluding these workers from vaccination was, quote, causing increased anxiety and uncertainty on already burdened by the pandemic health care workers in these settings, end quote, and given the concerns raised by Dr. Butts, who warned that without vaccinations the quality of the cancer care at the institute could be jeopardized, will the minister please explain why these practitioners were excluded in the first place from being in that phase 1A when so many other front-line health care workers were included?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, they were excluded because of the federal government not providing the vaccines that we need in this province, and I thank the hon. member for highlighting that. I share with her a frustration in the federal government not being able to provide those vaccines to this province, but the difficulty was that the advice that we received from not even just the NACI, the National Advisory Committee on Immunizations, but also our provincial advisory committee and Dr. Hinshaw and her office in trying to be able to allocate the small number of doses that we received in Q1 – anyways, thank you to the hon. member for having the same frustration that we have with the Trudeau government.

Ms Gray: Given that AHS has now decided to offer vaccinations to the staff because of the outbreak involving a case of the variant and given that had the staff been vaccinated beforehand, this outbreak may have been prevented and given that many Alberta physicians signed a petition and sent it to the Minister of Health calling for community practitioners to be granted priority vaccination, will the minister please tell this House when all community health practitioners at Cross Cancer and others across Alberta can expect to be vaccinated? If he can provide specifics, that would be very appreciated.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Those health professionals who have direct contact with patients are included in phase 2 – I think it's phase 2C – so we look forward to those physicians and their staff and other health professionals being able to get the vaccines into their arms as quickly as possible as soon as we are provided those vaccines by the federal government. Unfortunately, if you were to add up every vaccine that we have received since December, a third of them were received in the last five days. That's the frustrating situation we ourselves face in Alberta, and I share the same frustration that member has with the Trudeau government in not getting us those vaccines in time.

Electric Power Prices

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, we have been inundated with complaints from Albertans about sky-high electricity bills at a time when they can least afford it. Some have sent us pictures of bills with a single-month price tag of \$600 or more. Airdrie mother Lisa Gilling said that her electricity prices per kilowatt hour nearly quadrupled in March. She said that the bill was catastrophic to her household budget, adding, quote: do I cut back on groceries in order to have lights and hot water? To the minister: is it fair that Albertans have to choose between groceries and electricity?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's time for a little trip down NDP lane and the disruption that was caused to the

power market by the irresponsible decisions of the previous government. Shame on them for even coming up in this House to talk about electricity bills when they were so irresponsible at the other end, costing taxpayers billions. The irresponsibility of the NDP in handling the electricity file is a legacy they have to hang on to, similar to that member's legacy on rural crime.

Ms Ganley: Given, Mr. Speaker, that despite the minister's claims a study at U of C demonstrated that the government is actually making \$26 million on the REP program and given that a Calgary father of two who lost his job early in the pandemic and has been unable to find stable work since shared his monthly utility bill, which has shot up over \$600, and he is now drowning in late fees from his provider, to the minister: will you today commit to reimplementing a deferral program on utilities during the third wave of the pandemic and providing some type of relief?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems appropriate to answer the question: what do Albertans need relief from? Perhaps they need relief from the NDP closing down the more reliable baseload coal plants earlier than expected. As a result, costs ever since have gone up and up and up. The folks want to know who to blame. They need to actually look at themselves. The policies the NDP put in place will have long-term damage on the affordability of electricity. [interjections] Albertans know this. The NDP knows this. This is them trying to deflect their own mistakes.

The Speaker: Order. Order. I had some difficulty hearing the hon. minister answering the question. I didn't, however, have any challenge hearing the question. I hope that I'll be able to hear both this time.

Ms Ganley: Given that Alberta currently has the second-highest unemployment rate in Canada and given that a recent Angus Reid poll found that the percentage of Canadians reporting that they are worse off than they were a year ago is the highest in Alberta and given that the NDP government actually took action to protect consumers from wild price swings like the ones we're currently experiencing now, can the minister explain to Albertans why he isn't taking action to protect them from skyrocketing costs?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the NDP again are trying to deflect their record of failure, their record of not protecting consumers, their record of driving up electricity costs by prematurely closing the electricity plants, by a billion-and-a-half dollar Balancing Pool loss and unnecessary taxpayer subsidies to the industry on the backs of consumers. We know that it's a challenging time. We continue to work with Albertans with many areas of relief that our government has put in. But if you're talking about electricity problems, the problem is an NDP problem that we are working to deal with.

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

Educational Curriculum Redesign (continued)

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the election platform we committed to drafting a new curriculum that would focus on student outcomes and teach students skills that would be essential later in their lives. Furthermore, the new draft curriculum would be an opportunity to present new ideas of what should be taught in our classrooms. To the minister: who was consulted on this new curriculum, and how was the consultation process done?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government was elected with a mandate to pause the NDP's secretive curriculum review, and we did just that. We broadened consultation on a new ministerial order on student learning, which sets the vision for curriculum development to include a wider range of views, including parents, teachers, subject matter experts, postsecondary representatives, and employers. Now we want to hear from every Albertan, so I encourage every Albertan to go to alberta.ca/curriculum.

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that test scores in math, science, and literacy are all dropping, some parents in my constituency have turned to after school programs for private tutoring and further given that we all want to achieve a higher level of success for students and better prepare them for the future, to the minister: how is this new curriculum ensuring better outcomes for students? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Alberta's updated kindergarten to grade 6 curriculum will give students the essential skills and knowledge they will need to excel in an ever-changing world. We are preparing students for success by focusing on literacy, numeracy, citizenship, and practical skills. The curriculum will also have an increased focus on the development of work ethic, civic participation, 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.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that to date I have heard a wide range of feedback about our curriculum from parents in my constituency and given that parents and teachers, among others, have both positive and negative concerns and constructive suggestions, again to the minister: how will the feedback be managed and utilized and responded to to make appropriate changes to the draft curriculum?

2:20

Member LaGrange: Thank you again for the important question. Mr. Speaker, I've said it countless times, and I will continue to say it. I want to encourage every single Albertan to read the draft curriculum and provide their feedback at alberta.ca/curriculum. I also look forward to the classroom validation process, where teachers across our province will have the opportunity to test curriculum in the classrooms and provide us that valuable feedback as well. This is an incredibly important piece of the work that is ongoing, and we want to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to participate. If I didn't say it before: alberta.ca/curriculum.

Educational Curriculum Redesign and Francophone Education

Ms Renaud: Based on feedback from parents, teachers, and experts across the province on the draft curriculum, the list of what the UCP got right could probably fit into my 35-second time limit, but it wouldn't include francophone curriculum. Yesterday a number of francophone organizations stated that they have serious questions about the ability of the government to adequately meet the unique

and specific educational, cultural, and linguistic needs of francophone students with the new curriculum. To the Minister of Education: do you stand by this flawed curriculum when Alberta's francophone community clearly does not?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. I just want to assure everyone here that when we engaged all of the hundreds of teachers that were involved in the curriculum working group – the subject matter experts, who included francophone experts, as well as the deans of education, who also included the Faculty of Education, some from the francophone faculty of education Saint-Jean – there was much, much input, but we are always, always willing to listen to more input, and we welcome that feedback: alberta.ca/curriculum.

Ms Renaud: Given that the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, the federation of francophone school boards of Alberta, the federation of parents of francophones in Alberta, and the Société historique francophone de l'Alberta are all united in their concerns, the UCP had months to consult and fix these problems but chose not to, and the only mention of francophones is in grade 4 social studies, a virtue signal that's about as meaningful as flying a flag for less than a day, to the same minister: will you stand up for the francophone community and demand better than what this disastrous curriculum delivers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to reiterate the fact that we've had numerous – numerous – consultations with those organizations, and we'll continue to have numerous consultations. We want to hear from them, and the perfect way to hear from them, of course, is through our survey, but we also will be engaging all of our educational partners in the coming months, so we will hear more from them. Again, this is a draft, only a draft, and the final version will be out in 2022.

Ms Renaud: Given that the stakeholders view the draft curriculum as a step backwards in francophone education and given that despite the availability of francophone works from Albertans and francophone Canadians, the curriculum relies on translated, grammatically incorrect English works and given that the consultants on this curriculum were not francophone, to the Minister of Education: how does forcing groups to seek legal actions improve education in this province, and how much should taxpayers expect to spend for you to defend a curriculum that puts us backwards about 40 years?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that is just not true. In fact, we had numerous consultations. We continue to have those open-ended dialogues. As I've said, this has been the most transparent process ever. When you look at what was implemented previously, this is by far the most transparent. All of the names are up on the website. There is an ability to go on and fill in the survey. Please go and have a look at it. In fact, it's the first time ever that we've been able to provide the French curriculum at the same time as the English curriculum. That's a huge feat for us.

Thank you.

Calgary LRT Green Line

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Calgary is in a jobs emergency, yet this UCP government continues to listen to everyone but those who

will benefit and use the green line. The green line project creates 20,000 jobs. It's also vital to connecting Calgary's downtown and to the economic future of the city. That's what Calgarians who will use this green line are saying. To the minister of jobs: will you commit today to do whatever it takes to begin construction of the green line? Calgary has the second-highest unemployment rate in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened carefully to the hon. member's question, and he said to get downtown, which indicates that he's not aware that we started working with the city when the line they had planned doesn't get downtown. It actually gets to that member's riding and Inglewood, which is a beautiful neighbourhood – a beautiful neighbourhood – but it doesn't connect to the rest of the line. We're busy working with the city right now to solve the technical problems to connect to the rest of the line so that we can get downtown. The hon. member ought to get on board and help instead of complaining about what needs fixing.

Member Ceci: That's not really a commitment.

Given that the minister of jobs is listening to opponents of this project over those who will benefit from it but given that the minister is also responsible for the vitality of Calgary's downtown and given that he's also responsible for actually creating jobs although he's actually made the unemployment situation worse, to the minister of jobs: why is putting the people who oppose this green line ahead of the people who will most benefit from it – namely, those who will build it, operate it, and use it – acceptable? Why is that acceptable?

Mr. McIver: Again, the hon. member wasn't listening the first time, so I'll remind him that getting the green line to the downtown is actually the best way. He wants us to help fill up the buildings downtown with a line that wasn't going to get there. So now we're working with the city to make sure the line gets to the downtown, which will help not only fill up those buildings in the morning but empty them out at night. The hon. member should have actually preread his questions before he said them out loud in this room.

Member Ceci: Given that the vacancy rate in downtown Calgary is skyrocketing and given that the minister of jobs said that he's going to create a committee to revitalize the downtown core but given that the city is reporting right now in the Planning and Urban Development Committee and it says that an important action that could be done right now to help the downtown is to begin construction of the green line, a project that will put 20,000 people to work and connect the downtown with another light rail transit line when finished, come clean, Mr. Minister. Is your government trying to kill the green line once and for all?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, just for the record, I want to thank the city of Calgary, who has been working terrifically co-operatively with us, their technical officials with the technical officials from Transportation, to solve the gap and to get the green line downtown, which will do all the good things the hon. member is talking about. This is what we're at. We're on the same team. We're working with the city. The only one that doesn't seem to understand that is the hon. member that just asked the question. We are working hard to get the green line built: successful, on budget, and something we can all be proud of and something Calgarians will be able to use for the next hundred years. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand not in anger but to raise a voice of warning. Notwithstanding the destructive impact of COVID and a harmful federal government, neither of these facts negate the truth of our duty to compel us to confront a multibillion-dollar structural deficit. In these difficult times Albertans have to live within their means, and governments must do the same. To the minister: what is the government doing to live within its means?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the important question. Budget 2021 has three priorities: resourcing health to deal with the pandemic, positioning the province for economic recovery, and the continued efficient delivery of government services. Until we have more economic clarity, until we're past the pandemic, we've also identified fiscal anchors that will inform our fiscal decisions. We will ensure that our net debt-to-GDP ratio remains below 30 per cent, positioning this province for fiscal recovery.

Mr. Stephan: Given that deficit is harmful to our children and given that the MacKinnon report says Alberta has one of the highest per capita costs of government and given that labour costs account for the majority of the operating costs of government and given the private sector pays for the public sector, to the minister: to support the sustainability of public services for our children, what is the government doing to reduce public sector labour costs?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I just want to extend my deep appreciation for public-sector workers, particularly during this time of a pandemic, when many have been going above and beyond their regular responsibilities. This government did inherit a public sector with costs \$600 per capita higher than B.C. That's \$2.8 billion. As this government enters into negotiations with the public sector, our mandate reflects the economic realities of our province and remuneration levels of comparative provinces.

2:30

Mr. Stephan: Given that a fiscal anchor of Budget 2021 is to reduce the per capita costs of government and given that private member Bill 209, the Cost of Public Services Transparency Act, seeks to increase disclosure of the costs of government to increase taxpayer literacy, which is exciting, to the minister: how does more transparency, sharing the costs of public services with Albertans support accountability, sustainability, and the public interest?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to fiscal responsibility and accountability to taxpayers. Part of that accountability is giving Albertans as much information as possible about the costs of public services. This helps us demonstrate to taxpayers where their hard-earned money is going in our province. We welcome discussion on Bill 209 and look forward to increasing the transparency of public spending.

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

Provincial Police Force Feasibility Study

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta municipalities are rejecting this government's plan to replace the RCMP. In a letter Crowsnest Pass stated their opposition. "We do not understand why the Province would forge ahead with this process." The Morinville council also wrote a letter to the Justice minister, telling him that they oppose the idea and support their local RCMP detachment. How many municipalities need to tell the Justice minister that they oppose his plan before this government finally listens and cancels this poorly thought out plan?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province embarked on a provincial police transition study to determine the appropriateness of 21st-century policing, one that the province can afford. But, again, the members opposite are not interested in the problems that many of our fellow Albertans face in their various communities. This is an opportunity for us to deep dive into making sure that we have the appropriate community policing in our province.

Mr. Sabir: Given that many municipalities are rightly concerned about the increasing cost of policing that this plan will leave on their residents, with Smoky Lake council telling the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock that the funds they are paying will not provide any additional patrols or services for rural areas, and given that Smoky Lake states that the cost of this policy will increase from \$63,000 this year to nearly \$200,000 by 2024, will the minister reveal right now how many communities will get boots on the ground?

The Speaker: The Solicitor General.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the members opposite like to dwell on, you know, confusion and deception and stuff like that. This is a transition study. We don't even have the report. We don't know how much it's going to cost, higher or less. But my commitment to the people of Alberta is that if the report comes back to say that it makes good financial sense for us to proceed, we would proceed, and I am going to make sure that it is something that the people of Alberta can afford, not the NDP fearmongering.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock appears to actually agree with the municipalities who oppose this government's plan on policing and given that the member told the Smoky Lake council, and I quote, that so far none of the municipalities he had town hall meetings with are in favour of the extra costs and given that the member also committed to telling the government that there is, and I quote, no value in moving in this direction, Minister, municipalities are opposed, Albertans are opposed, and even the UCP backbenchers are opposed. Who are you listening to when everybody involved is opposed?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the municipal partners across our province that I hear them when they raise concerns around costs, but embedded in that particular question is also the acknowledgement that we do have issues of rural crime, the lack of adequate response time across our province, mostly in rural Alberta, something that the NDP, you know, overlooked throughout their tenure in office. This government committed to pursue Alberta's best interests, and we will do that.

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

Coal Development Policies and Water Monitoring

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers are excited about the federal investment in irrigation, which will help grow their industry and ensure that they're sustainable for years to come, but without access to clean water this infrastructure means nothing. They're worried because these investments in irrigation will only pay off if ranchers have access to clean water, and they greatly fear the potential impact of coal mining and the apparent willingness of the UCP government to accommodate more coal mines. Why is the government ignoring the legitimate worries of ranchers on the potential pollution of the water? Why has water monitoring been cut, and why have there been no specific consultations held with them?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, yet again more falsehoods from the NDP. Monitoring has not been cut, and there have been no changes to water rules or water allocations associated with coal mining. It is unfortunate that the hon. member and her party continue to fearmonger on this issue. It's just not true. Again, the Energy minister has a coal consultation process taking place. But to be very, very clear, Alberta's rigorous water rules have not changed.

Ms Sweet: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that I'm hearing from producers who are saying that they now have to pay for their own water monitoring and given that the government consulted extensively with Australian coal billionaires and promised to accommodate them while not informing ranchers of these potential changes and given that ranchers are key to one of Alberta's largest industries and given the serious impact that contaminated water will have on the agricultural industry and our economy, why has the government continued to make sweetheart deals with foreign billionaires while ignoring ranchers and threatening their livelihoods?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, that's completely and utterly false. The NDP just spend their time making things up. Nothing has changed when it comes to water monitoring programs inside our province or when it comes to water allocations or when it comes to water legislation or when it comes to water policy. Nothing has changed from when that member was in government. The only thing that has changed is that the Official Opposition continues to fearmonger and make things up. Shame on them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, given that producers are telling me that they have to pay for their own water monitoring and given that in some areas road-building approvals for coal exploration have already exceeded legal limits and given that the government is mulling over making changes to the Oldman River watershed to make more water available to coal and given that ranchers are extremely worried about the cumulative impact of all of these activities, why is the government not stopping all exploration and publishing all considerations to change water allocation and water testing until these so-called consultations are over? Why are you putting billionaire corporations over Albertans and their livelihoods?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, completely and utterly false and completely made up. Let's talk about a couple exploration licences that were actually made underneath the NDP government: Palisades from Altitude Resources, approved on August 6, 2015; Grassy Mountain, the one that's in the news right now, December 11, 2015, by that hon. member and her government; Cardinal River with Teck Resources, February 21, 2017. Who was the government

at the time? The NDP. This is complete and utter nonsense from the hon. member and her party, completely and utterly false, and they are outright lying when it comes to water. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. member knows that last week the Speaker ruled the word “lying” out of order. He can withdraw and apologize.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I’m happy to apologize for pointing out the lies, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: He can apologize unreservedly.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I’m happy to apologize unreservedly and to withdraw pointing out the lies.

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

Federal and Provincial Responses to COVID-19

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At every step the federal government has mismanaged COVID-19. Rather than be proactive, they hide and blame others. In the spring of 2019 Trudeau dismantled the country’s pandemic early warning system. Then with a world crisis looming, they said that closing the border was racist and xenophobic. As a result of inaction, they let COVID-19 into Canada. Later they said that masks were ineffective, then urged their use, and now Trudeau continues to bungle vaccine procurement. To the Minister of Health: how are you managing this crisis with such missteps by the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has one of the best vaccine programs in Canada, with more than 755,000 doses administered so far. Now, despite setbacks from the federal government, as the member mentions, we’re getting vaccines into the arms of Albertans as quickly and as safely as possible. We’re opening up eligibility faster than any other jurisdiction in Canada, but we’re in a race with variants and vaccines. We needed those doses a month ago, two months ago. But now we’re finally getting them, and we’ll get them to Albertans as fast as possible.

2:40

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

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that many of my constituents in Airdrie-Cochrane are thrilled about Alberta’s vaccine rollout and the prospect of protecting the most vulnerable and given that inconsistent vaccine supply caused local pharmacies in my riding to cancel hundreds of appointments and given that my constituents and Albertans at large continue to be adversely affected by Trudeau’s failure to provide consistent supply, to the minister: can you update this House on the status of vaccine delivery and the prospect of getting doses in the arms of Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only constraint on our vaccine rollout is supply from Ottawa. Delays in shipments have been extremely frustrating, and we can’t give out doses that we just don’t have. But we won’t let that stop us. As of April 6 more than 14 per cent of all Albertans have received their first dose. We were the first province in the country to offer vaccines to all residents in long-term care and what we call designated supportive living sites across the province. Alberta has vaccinated 80 per cent

of those who are 80-plus, 70 per cent of those who are 70 to 79, and 56 per cent of those who are 65 to 69.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again, Minister. Given that Alberta has the most dynamic vaccine distribution system in Canada, with the capacity to vaccinate many more, and given that Alberta recently announced that over 250 more pharmacies along with family physicians across the province will soon be able to offer COVID-19 immunizations to their patients, to the minister: what assurances have been provided to you by the close friend and ally to Alberta’s NDP, Justin Trudeau, that this increase in demand could actually be met?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that vaccinations are our ticket out of this. We continue to demand more from Ottawa. Alberta’s vaccine rollout is one of the best in the country, with among the highest percentage of doses administered. We’ve recently expanded eligibility to include 500,000 more Albertans. As of today over 1.5 million Albertans are eligible to receive their vaccine. We’re also more than doubling the number of pharmacies giving vaccinations, with hundreds more, along with, as the member said, community physicians in the weeks ahead.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 71, to be put on the Order Paper in my name, which states the following:

- A. Be it resolved that despite any standing order, practice of the Legislative Assembly, or the 2021 sessional calendar, at any time during the Second Session of the 30th Legislature the Government House Leader may, upon providing a minimum of 24 hours’ written notice to the Speaker, advise that the public interest requires the Assembly to sit extended hours
 - (a) on Thursday beyond the normal adjustment hour, or
 - (b) on Friday or Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., commencing with Prayers, followed by
 - (i) the ordinary daily Routine to consist of those items set out in Standing Order 7(1), with Oral Question Period commencing at 10:20 a.m., and for the purpose of standing orders 7(7) and 7(8) the daily Routine shall be deemed completed at 11:30 a.m., and
 - (ii) Orders of the Day to consist of those items of business set out in Standing Order 8(2) and the Speaker shall give notice that the Assembly shall meet at that time to transact its business;
- B. And be it further resolved that this motion (a) takes effect immediately on passage and (b) expires at 11:59 p.m. on Friday, June 4, 2021.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 63
Police (Street Checks and Carding)
Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pride to request leave of this Assembly to move first reading of Bill 63, the Police (Street Checks and Carding) Amendment Act, 2021.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments to the Police Act will allow for the creation of a regulation that will formalize the ban on carding and the rules for street checks that were introduced in November 2020. These investigatory practices can be confusing for the public, which is why we must clarify them in law.

Carding, Mr. Speaker, is when officers randomly request personal information from a member of the public without reasonable grounds. This practice is an inappropriate use of police power that has habitually targeted racialized and minority communities. Street checks, on the other hand, are voluntary interactions, observations that result in an officer collecting personal or identifying information and entering it into a database for future use.

This bill is a necessary step towards the creation of a clear set of rules that will ensure that police respect Albertans' rights, without depriving them of a useful investigative tool. Mr. Speaker, as part of the commitment that we made as a government to build a province in which all Albertans can feel respected, I'm pleased to be introducing this particular bill, and I hope members on both sides of the House will support this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I request leave to move first reading of Bill 63.

[Motion carried; Bill 63 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bill 214
Eastern Slopes Protection Act

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request leave to introduce a bill, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act.

The Eastern Slopes Protection Act responds to the incredible groundswell from Albertans of all walks of life calling for the protection of the Rocky Mountains and its sensitive headwaters for future generations of Albertans. If passed, this bill would protect sensitive lands and watersheds, including the Oldman River basin. These lands and waters support communities, businesses, biodiversity, and the drinking water of so many Albertans.

The bill upholds indigenous treaty rights and other indigenous rights and traditional activities. It will cancel all exploration activities, including road building and drill pits. It would ban in perpetuity coal mining development and exploration in categories 1 and 2 of the eastern slopes. It would prohibit coal mining in categories 3 and 4 until an enhanced regional plan that protects lands and waters from coal development is developed, with input from all Albertans.

We know how much all members of this Assembly have been hearing from their constituents. It's my sincere hope that all members of the House will join me to support this bill in an act of prohibitions and protections that Albertans want for the Rocky Mountains and sensitive headwaters. As such, I move first reading of this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 214 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you will indulge me, I have four tablings today. The first is 351 signatures on a petition asking to reverse the deindexing of AISH, collected by a constituent of mine, Kavin.

My second tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier, a petition of signatures and comments about the impact of the changes to AISH deindexing on the lives of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the next one is a document that is a petition to change the AISH payment date. It contains 3,990 signatures.

And, Mr. Speaker, the final document I have to table is the comments on the impact of the changes to AISH payment dates on the lives of Calgarians.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of the study from the University of Guelph that I quoted in my member's statement earlier today.

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

2:50

Bill 51
Citizen Initiative Act

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act. This bill is about strengthening democracy in Alberta and making sure Albertans have an even more powerful voice when it comes to matters that impact their lives.

Albertans have told us again and again that they want a greater say in the business of government and between elections. In fact, in the fall of 2020 the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee held public meetings and accepted written submissions about this legislation. To be blunt, the all-party committee found that Albertans were very supportive of citizen initiative legislation.

Under Bill 51 any Albertan who is an eligible voter could bring forward an initiative for government to consider. This could be ideas for new laws or policies or even proposals for constitutional referendum questions, or it could be used to correct a government that failed to uphold what they campaigned on, for example the NDP's immensely unpopular Bill 6 and the carbon tax. If Albertans had that democratic tool at their disposal, voters could have expressed their democratic will and held the NDP to account at the time.

To bring an initiative forward, an Albertan would apply to the Chief Electoral Officer to start a petition for their idea for an initiative. After submitting their application, the Chief Electoral Officer would provide them with a petition that they would need to use to gather signatures of eligible voters. For their petition to be successful, Mr. Speaker, they would need 10 per cent of voters province-wide for legislative policy initiatives. For constitutional initiatives petitioners would need the signatures of 20 per cent of voters province-wide, and petitioners would need that level of support in two-thirds of Alberta's constituencies. In practical terms that means 58 constituencies. And to be clear, that is 20 per cent support in each of those 58 constituencies. They would have 90 days to gather the signatures. Once completed, the Chief Electoral

Officer would review the signatures and determine if the petition is successful.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Successful legislative and policy initiatives would be referred to a committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for consideration. If the committee does not support a legislative initiative, a public vote will be held. Successful constitutional initiatives would proceed through the process established in the Referendum Act. This includes a resolution being made in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and the Lieutenant Governor issuing an order for a referendum to be held.

The Citizen Initiative Act, Mr. Speaker, will give Albertans a chance to put forward their ideas for government to consider, giving them a real and meaningful way to be directly involved in our government's democratic process. Albertans must have a greater say in their democratic system. They must be able to hold their elected officials accountable and participate in the democratic process between elections. The Citizen Initiative Act puts Albertans in the driver's seat of their democracy.

I urge all members of this Assembly to support this very important legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister. I just want to clarify that you are moving second reading of Bill 51.

Mr. Madu: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. With that, I move second reading of Bill 51.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. minister.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to this bill, but I believe I'll have an opportunity to do that many times throughout the course of this longer debate. At the moment I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 61 Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2021

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 61, the Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2021.

The amendments proposed in this bill address another gap in our legislation that puts the safety and security of Alberta families and communities at risk, and that's something I'm just simply not willing to ignore. This legislation is a step that follows up on the changes that we made last summer, and while I'm sure you remember them, Mr. Speaker, for those following along, online perhaps, let me just offer a short recap.

Just over a year ago I learned that Saskatchewan was taking steps to prohibit convicted sex offenders from being able to legally change their names. This move came after two convicted sex offenders had legally changed their names, one of whom had also relocated to Regina. These situations shone a light through the loopholes in Saskatchewan's legislation, so I immediately checked our own legislation to see if a similar loophole existed, and unfortunately it did. I was shocked to learn about that loophole and so were many other Albertans, including advocacy and community groups from all across the province. I remember very clearly how

the CEO of Edmonton's Zebra Child Protection Centre told me that within a week of our reaching out to her about our plans for that legislation, Mr. Speaker, she had had a file cross her desk that involved exactly that type of situation, where a convicted sex offender had reoffended after changing their name.

So we acted to close that loophole as soon as we could, Mr. Speaker. Alberta families and communities should know that such vile criminals cannot hide their identities, hide from their pasts, or hide in our communities. We know that survivors are left with no choice but to live with the effects of their trauma for the rest of their lives. It only makes sense that we should make sure that their offenders have to live under their own names.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation that we have before us today is an important next step. The amendments in this bill will ensure that dangerous and long-term offenders will have to live with the names they were convicted under for the rest of their lives. In addition, high-risk offenders will not be able to legally change their names as long as they are deemed to be high risk. This is a simple but significant step that we can take to protect Alberta families and to keep our communities safe.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, just like last year, this is a real problem. In fact, only a few months ago a dangerous offender in Edmonton made it clear that he wanted to change his name and he wanted there to be a publication ban on that name change. Some of the offences he had committed included shooting a police officer in the back of the head, assaulting a toddler, and beating an Edmonton man within an inch of his life, causing severe brain damage and requiring that gentleman to remain in care for the rest of his life, for 16 years. Several psychiatrists labelled this criminal a psychopath, likely to reoffend. In no way should violent criminals like this one be permitted to legally change their names in order to hide in our communities and hide from their pasts. This is a real-life example from right here in Edmonton that shows there is an urgent need for us to act now. By acting now we will make sure that Alberta families and communities are safer and we will give some sense of peace of mind for survivors and for the families of victims.

When I announced this legislation, I was so pleased to be joined by Karen Kuntz, the executive director of the Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society. Her voice on this is incredibly important. I don't know if you had the opportunity to hear her speak, Mr. Speaker, but her words were powerful and they were moving. Not only does she spend her days working with victims and survivors and their families, but she is herself a survivor, and she spoke from that experience. She referenced the daily fear she felt even many years later and how that also affected her family, and she also noted that this fear would have been so much worse if her offender had been able to legally change his name.

3:00

I'll note, Mr. Speaker, that I'm summing up her words because what she said on that day is most powerful coming directly from her. I would encourage you and any other members of this Assembly who have not had the opportunity yet to hear what she had to say to look online for the video of that announcement. For those unsure of where to look, you can find it on my Facebook page or by clicking on the link directly available via the news release on the alberta.ca website.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's useful for me to outline more specifically who these changes affect. The changes proposed in this legislation affect a small subset of the most violent of criminals. For a violent convicted criminal to receive either the dangerous offender or the long-term offender designation, the Crown must have serious concerns about the crimes committed and the convicted criminal's possibility or probability of rehabilitation. Offenders labelled with

these designations have been convicted of or have pled guilty to very serious personal injury offences. In addition, these offenders have demonstrated a pattern of repeated behaviour that is unlikely to change, and they present a real threat to the life, the safety, and the physical or mental well-being of others. The Crown must also be able to prove that the offender is likely to commit serious harm or injury in the future.

Applying the dangerous or long-term offender status is not done lightly or easily as it involves another court process where the Crown must prove its case and must prove that such a designation is warranted. Given the grave and serious implications of these designations it is completely appropriate for us to impose a lifetime ban prohibiting these offenders from legally changing their names.

When it comes to high-risk offenders, Mr. Speaker, there's a different process, so they are also treated differently than dangerous and long-term offenders in this legislation. If this legislation passes, those criminals designated high-risk would be prohibited from legally changing their names for as long as they are deemed to be high-risk. The high-risk status is applied by law enforcement, not the courts, and this decision is made before a serious violent offender is released from prison while still being considered to be a significant safety risk.

Mr. Speaker, each of these criminal designations takes into account the significant safety risk to Alberta families and communities, and that's why I have proposed these changes and why we are debating them today. I hope that I can count on support from all members of this Assembly, but if this legislation passes, my job will not yet be complete. While I am proud to lead the way and be the first in the country to make these changes, I recognize that the protections offered by this legislation stop at Alberta's border.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have the power to stop these dangerous offenders from moving to another province and legally changing their name there. That is why I am calling on every other province and territory in Canada to join us in implementing these strong protections, so that all Canadians can rest assured that these violent criminals will never be able to hide from their past or hide in our communities. I have written to my counterparts to urge them to consider replicating the important work that we have started, and I have offered to support them by sharing the work that we have done already to develop this legislation. I'm also pleased to see that the Premier has committed to speaking with Premiers all across the country, to advocate directly with them to join us in implementing these strong protections.

Alberta is the first in the country to table these amendments. I hope we'll be the first to pass them and to bring these changes into force, but I also hope that we are not the last. It is so important that we take every step that we can to ensure the safety and the protection of Alberta families and communities. The changes that I have introduced will make Alberta safer, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that I can count all members of this Assembly to support them. I want to especially thank my chief of staff, Jamie Mozeson, for her passion and commitment to helping me get this to where it is today.

With that, I would move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 56

Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate April 6: Mr. Jason Nixon]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to join debate.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this particular bill at this particular time I find it incredibly interesting because this government was elected with a promise. As they often do, they'll say: no new taxes. No new taxes, no new taxes, no new taxes: in fact, that's what they run on. That's what they're known for running on. Conservative governments are known for running on that. Of course, when Albertans hear that, what they're hearing is: well, we're not going to have to pay more; we're not going to have to pay more out of our own pocket for things.

See, this is where Conservative governments like to confuse it all because what they're saying is, "No new taxes," even though they've broken that promise in this particular bill. But I'll get to that, Mr. Speaker. What Conservative governments like to do is that they like to create user fees, so then they end up passing on to the Alberta citizen costs for services from the government on a number of things. What Albertans find they have to end up doing is then taking more money out of their own pocket.

This is something that I have to stress because so many people will argue, "Well, you know, with progressive governments we end up paying higher taxes," when essentially if – the personal income tax is at 10 per cent year after year after year after year, Mr. Speaker. You know this. If it's 10 per cent, it's 10 per cent this year, 10 per cent next year, and 10 per cent the year after that. The only way you're going to end up paying more taxes is if you yourself make more money in that particular year. That's after you've crossed a certain threshold.

I personally don't understand when Conservatives go out there and they tell Albertans, "Well, you're going to have to pay more in taxes if you vote for a progressive government; if you vote for the opposition, you're going to end up paying more in taxes," yet here we find ourselves with this particular Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, and they're actually, well, introducing a tax. But, like I said, I'll get to that.

It's very important to understand that when it comes to government and the difference between the way that the other side governs and the way that we govern, that has to do with specific priorities and how we listen to the priorities of Albertans and what they want us to be focusing on as we continue to make Alberta a better province for all Albertans. Essentially, your taxpayer dollars end up going from one particular priority to another. Where this government likes to focus on giving billions of dollars to corporations, because they continue to believe in trickle-down economics and they think that by giving these big corporations these tax breaks and just handing all this money over to these big corporations, that's actually going to create more jobs here in the province of Alberta, that's not the position that we have over on this side of the House.

What we would rather do is take those taxpayer dollars that belong to Albertans – those taxpayer dollars that belong to Albertans – and make sure that we're investing in the future of Alberta, investing in important programs and services for the people of Alberta rather than giving those billions of dollars over to corporations with the illusion that these corporations are then going to create good, stable jobs for Albertans. Now, I understand that you do need foreign investment. You do need foreign investment in the province. You do need that foreign investment to come into the province.

3:10

But I would stress that, even more importantly, we need to strengthen the local economy by investing and providing opportunities for small business in the province of Alberta, something that this government has failed on. I've spoken about it a number of times in the House already, and I continue to do so

because I continue to advocate for small business here in the province of Alberta. So many small businesses within Edmonton-Ellerslie and all over Edmonton and all over Alberta have been stressing to this government, demanding from this government that they help support small business in this province as we continue to try to get to the end of this pandemic so that they can survive till the end of this pandemic. I've seen it for myself, businesses that have had to close themselves here in Edmonton-Ellerslie, small mom-and-pop coffee shops that have had to close their doors because they just weren't getting the supports that they needed from this government to make it to the other side of the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, it has to do with priorities. It has to do with priorities. Here we find in this Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act that – I find it so ironic because in the last election this UCP alternative went to the people of Alberta, and they said: “Look, trust us. We are better for the economy. We’re going to create jobs. We’re going to make Alberta better.” They ended up getting the vote from a lot of the rural communities, a lot of municipalities from around Alberta because those people trusted this alternative to actually come into this House and create those opportunities for them and their families, the same people that they constantly preached to, saying: we’re going to make life better for you; no new taxes.

Yet here we have this bill where they’ve essentially just passed on all of the costs to municipalities. This government is finding every possible way to increase costs on Albertans. They’re increasing the provincial park fees, deindexing the income tax system, more property tax. This is the reality behind the decisions and the priorities that this government is making. What’s happening is that your average Albertan, that lives throughout the province, is having to pay more out of their own pocket for the services and the programs that they’re accessing while the income tax that they’re paying, although they’re deindexing the income tax system, year over year over year will tend to remain at 10 per cent.

What have they done? I don’t know what else to call that, Mr. Speaker. I don’t know what else to call that but a misguidance. I’m using parliamentary language because I could call it something else, and I can tell you what other Albertans are calling it because they believed this government. They believed that this government was going to do better for those average Albertans out there. So here we are. Now that these Albertans are paying their 10 per cent personal income tax and then on top of that are having to pay the user fees for accessing the same kinds of services that under previous governments they wouldn’t have had to because the amount that they were paying in taxes was going to cover that particular service, what else can you call that but duping – duping – the Alberta public? Again, it has to go back to priorities, going back to priorities and where the actual tax dollars of Albertans are actually being spent, on which programs and which services.

With this particular bill they’re making it so that municipalities are going to have to struggle. It legislates the cuts to the MSI program, and in line with Budget 2021, the UCP argues that although there’s a cut, they are front-loading some of the cash to ease the burden on municipalities. So for 2021-2022 it’s \$1.2 billion, and then the following year it goes down to \$485 million and then the same in ’23-24. That’s less than half of the budget being provided in 2022-2023 and then, again, less than half compared to ’21-22. Less than half. To Albertans out there: I’m asking them to please look at the facts; look at what’s actually happening with the decisions and what this government is prioritizing when it comes to the programs and services that are actually going to the municipalities.

We’ve had a number of stakeholders that have actually come out and spoken publicly about the fact that this government is actually taking away more and more and more support, economic support,

from municipalities. So what is it that they expect the municipalities to do but to then raise property taxes? At the end of the day, that average Albertan that lives in this rural community, in this municipality, is going to have to decide: do you want the service, or do you just live without it? The municipality isn’t going to be able to pay for it, and the provincial government isn’t going to pay for it either.

This is coming from the same group of people that promised Albertans more opportunities. They promised them a better economy. They continue to promise a better livelihood for Albertans. And what are they getting in exchange? They’re getting less economic support to municipalities amongst a long, long, long, long list of other deficiencies, and all for what, Mr. Speaker? Because this government decided to prioritize giving billions of taxpayer dollars over to corporations, some of which have taken those taxpayer dollars and actually moved away to other jurisdictions, not only to other places in Canada but to other places in North America. Those dollars, that belong to those Alberta taxpayers – I’ll remind them – are supposed to be for providing services and programs for Albertans.

I don’t understand how they can justify this. At the very least, you would have thought: okay; we’re going to give these corporations this money. Then, at least, make it so that they’ve got to stay inside the province, actually tie it to creating jobs right here in the province. But they didn’t even do that, Mr. Speaker. How can they claim to be fighting for Albertans when all they did was that they just handed over this chunk of money? They just handed over this big, huge chunk of money, and then these corporations walked away with it. Does this sound fair? Does this sound just?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I believe the hon. Minister of Justice caught my eye.

3:20

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel that it is important to just set the record straight for the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on how we got here in the midst of a pandemic in 2021. I’ve carefully listened to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talk about businesses. Sometimes, you know, it baffles me how it is that the members continue to stand before this Assembly to talk about businesses, something that they know nothing about. How did we get here? How did we get to a place where Alberta was unprepared financially to deal with a pandemic none of us saw coming? Because of the members opposite’s reckless four years in office. While other provinces were preparing for tomorrow, the NDP were running debt and deficit as if we pluck money from the trees. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister. I just am having some trouble hearing. I just want to remind all members that the individual with the floor under 29(2)(a) at this time is the Minister of Justice. I believe that there will be other 29(2)(a)s and other opportunities to speak on this matter at other times.

If the hon. Minister of Justice could please continue.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the members opposite took over the reins of our province in 2015. In 2015 there was a technical surplus of \$1.3 billion. Then in 2015-2016 they ran a deficit of \$6.9 billion. In 2016-2017 they ran a deficit of \$8 billion. In 2017-2018 they ran a deficit of nearly \$10 billion. And the year that they were defeated, they ran a deficit of another \$6.9 billion. They took a province that had a combined debt of \$10.9 billion in 2015 to a record \$70 billion. That is the NDP’s record.

Mr. Speaker, how is it any wonder, then, that Alberta in the midst of a pandemic would struggle? What is their answer? Their answer,

during a pandemic in which they know, in which everyone knows that businesses are still struggling, is what? Let us raise taxes by another 20 per cent on a community of businesses that are still struggling to survive. The government is spending so much money to keep businesses afloat. The NDP's record of, you know, managing the economy is to further drive businesses into bankruptcy and out of our province.

That is precisely what they did, Mr. Speaker, if you will recall. When they took office in 2015, the corporate income tax in this province was 10 per cent. They raised it by 20 per cent, from 10 to 12 per cent. What was the result? Hundreds of billions of dollars fled our province and a record unemployment rate. More than 170,000 Albertans lost their jobs. That is the record of the members opposite, that want to stand before the floor of this House to talk to us about support for businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I come from Edmonton-South West, with great small businesses, and what I do every single day that I am in the community for small businesses is thank goodness that the United Conservatives are in charge of this government at this point in time in our history. Otherwise, there would have been lockdowns for much of 2020, with zero income, with zero business activity. And the members opposite continue to advocate for an absolute lockdown. What do they think will happen to businesses?

Mr. Speaker, we have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to support communities across our province in the midst of a pandemic we have never seen before, and this government will continue to front-load billions of dollars to support our municipalities; by the way, as the Minister of Municipal Affairs said: \$500 million in capital infrastructure plus more than \$10 billion in capital infrastructure for municipalities. The construction companies across our municipalities were thanking us because we kept them afloat and we kept them in business. As a consequence, many of our people and communities did well while still struggling because of the pandemic. No, we will not go back to the reckless, irresponsible economic record of the NDP. Albertans deserve better.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 56 because I think it's incredibly important. To begin with, I think it's worth starting out, since the door was thrown open, by speaking to the minister's comments. I think it's worth pointing out that this UCP government has a record in office, too, a record of two years, a record of higher deficit, higher taxes, higher unemployment, higher costs, and fewer services than any government in the history of this province. I'd also like to point out that their moves cost Alberta 50,000 jobs before the pandemic even hit.

They speak of their support for small business, but we were the ones who cut tax for small business. They didn't touch the small-business tax rate. The only people they cut the taxes for were the Walmarts of the world. Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear who it is that's here, who it is that supports regular Albertans, that supports municipalities, that supports small businesses, and it is the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth talking about a few things that are going on in this particular bill. Bill 56 doesn't look like much as you read through it. It's sort of a lot of changing of dates and numbers. It's worth talking to Albertans about what those changing dates and what those changing numbers actually mean, and what they mean is that this provincial government is cutting funding to

municipalities, is cutting back on funding, and this is part of a larger move. It's part of a move to get rid of an agreement that was struck between the provinces and large municipalities to give them greater agency, to give them greater ability to affect the lives of their citizens, because at the end of the day it is those municipal governments who are responsible for creating community for their citizens.

A lot of people don't actually really know what the division of powers looks like, so it's worth listing a few things that municipalities do. They're responsible for fire, police, water, snow removal, roads, parks, recreation, and creating the vibrant communities that are around us every day. Those are some pretty big things. They have some pretty big impacts on everyday lives.

Mr. Speaker, I think that before I continue my remarks, I would like to move an amendment, and then I will speak further to it. I will ensure that you get your original here, and I will just wait for that to reach the table.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

As is the procedure during these times, for anybody who would like to receive a copy of the amendment, please put up your hand, and one will be delivered to you. There will also be copies at the tables at both entrances for any member to pick up should they choose to do it that way.

If the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View could please continue and read it in for the record, that would be very appreciated.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 56, Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 56, Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with order 74.2.

The reason, Mr. Speaker, that I . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but for everybody's reference, this will be referred to as amendment REF1. Thank you.

Please continue.

Ms Ganley: Thank you. The reason that I make this amendment is that I think we need to take the time to consider the implications of this bill. The things I just listed – fire, police, water, snow removal, roads, parks, recreation, community – are all responsibilities of cities. These are a big part of our lives, so I think that before we make these cuts, particularly at a time right now, when Albertans are relying on their municipalities more than ever, we need to consider the impact that these things will have because municipal governments are not like the provincial government.

3:30

They're not allowed to support Albertans by running a deficit in difficult times. They have to balance their budgets, and what that means is that when grants are removed, when costs are downloaded to them – there have been a lot of costs in addition to cuts to MSI. You know, we're seeing delays in green line funding, we're seeing the downloading of costs for the RCMP, we see cuts to police funding, specifically tickets and fines in larger municipalities. All of these costs add up for cities, and they either can cut services or they can raise taxes on their residents. Now, many of the smaller municipalities, who are also facing companies deferring the payment of their taxes in addition to multimillion-dollar bills for

policing, will have no choice. They'll have no choice but to raise taxes on their residents, and those, I think, can be attributed fairly to the UCP raising those taxes for those individuals.

I think it's worth considering, too, what the other options are, you know, in terms of what a municipality could do. Obviously, some portion of these costs, some portion of these cuts will be downloaded onto residents, and they will show up in their property tax. That's challenging. It's challenging at a time when we're facing an unprecedented economic downturn, when we're facing a pandemic, when everyone is struggling so much already. I think that's something to consider, and it's a huge concern. That's going to affect a lot of my constituents. It's going to affect constituents throughout the province, rural ones even more so. I think that's wildly problematic for those individuals.

I think it also, you know, is worth considering that in this time of pandemic, if ever there has been a time when we can look around and say, "Community is important; it's incredibly important to us," it's right now, when we're being sort of taken out of that community. It is the cities which are largely responsible for that community building, and, in fact, community building itself is incredibly important to public health.

Walkable, livable cities, where people can come together, impact mental health, but they also impact physical health. You know, we talk a lot about physical health and sort of long-term diseases that are afflicting our population. We always seem to place these things on the individual, but I don't think they're rightly placed there in all cases. In a lot of cases it is the design of our cities: the ability to walk to work, the ability to bike to work, the ability to walk to the neighbourhood grocery store. We design our cities so that when everyone comes out of their house, they don't interact with anyone else, they get in their cars, they drive a long way to work, and they get out, and then we wonder why people exercise less.

I think, you know, these cuts to cities, at a time when cities in this province are finally making moves to ensure that we can see bike lanes, making moves to ensure that neighbourhoods are walkable, making moves to see that people can commute on transit, which usually involves walking in our cities – I think this is a terrible time to be cutting back on them. It's a terrible time to be taking from cities their ability to build these communities.

It's also a terrible time for this UCP government to be downloading these costs onto families. You know, with the policing costs alone the calculations of the RMA had indicated that average families could see their property tax bills go up \$400 a year. That's a significant increase for a lot of people and an increase that they probably would have had trouble bearing at the best of times, but especially right now that is incredibly difficult for individuals.

We see also, you know, a situation where families will be asked to pay more on their cellphone bills. This just all adds up to an increasing problem, a problem where Albertans are asked to pay more and more by this provincial government and to get less and less in return. I think that's incredibly problematic because we know how many people are struggling.

I know all of the MLAs in this place must be getting the same e-mails that I'm getting from constituents, constituents struggling with basic costs. These aren't people who are spending their money on luxuries. They're trying to afford shelter and food and their utilities, and they're genuinely struggling with those costs. You know, I think that's a big problem, and certainly there are a lot of factors that impact that struggle, but the moves made by this UCP government are all in the direction of making it worse. They removed the cap on insurance. They downloaded costs to municipalities, who will download them to private citizens. They increased costs on cellphone bills. They don't seem to be taking any steps to mitigate the costs that are being downloaded onto people.

Worse, we see them cutting back on services at a time when Albertans can ill afford that, so families struggle. They struggle more and more.

This, again, just sort of indicates a problem with relationship, a problem with the relationship between this provincial government and municipalities, some of which are very big and complex actors now, who are capable of taking on more responsibility and doing more things for their citizens, who are capable of sort of making local decisions on the basis of local needs, but this government is taking that ability away from them.

This is another order of government. It's an order of government that does things that are very important to our lives. You know, I feel like roads, water, fire, police: these are things that are important. It can't be argued that they aren't. The people who are doing those things ought to be respected, and this isn't respect. Breaking a deal you had previously made – I mean, it certainly seems to be the general way of being of this UCP government, to break promises you have previously made, but this is not how Albertans should be interacting with each other. In this time of crisis we should be coming together more and more to take care of each other, obviously not physically – we can't come together physically right now – but we can still come together emotionally. We can check on each other. We can talk to each other. We can care about each other, and we can treat each other with respect. I think of all the times, this is an incredibly important time for that, and I think that this bill not only doesn't contribute to that, but it makes the situation of people throughout the province living in municipalities worse. It makes their situation worse.

I want to talk a little bit about the green line project. It won't be affected directly by this funding, but it all sort of ties together – right? – this withdrawal of money from municipalities. The city of Calgary was doing amazing things to create a more livable community to allow people to come together more easily, you know, to decrease this tendency of, like, one person each in their car and to build a greater community. This government has now stalled it to the point where it definitely won't commence construction this season. I mean, they claim to continue to be committed to it, but it certainly wouldn't be the first time they've claimed one thing and then done another.

I think that all of these things are a huge concern. Ultimately the cost of this is going to be downloaded to Albertans and in a way that's very nontransparent. It's obfuscated on purpose, almost. You know, the costs are downloaded to municipalities, who in turn have to download to individuals, and ultimately that is the province raising your taxes. That's what it is, but it doesn't look that way. They're hoping to sort of hide behind this veneer and hoping that Albertans won't see through it. Well, I think that this government has hoped that a lot about Albertans, that they won't see through it in a number of instances, and I think that it hasn't worked, so I would urge the government to consider taking another course and to have a real and honest conversation with Albertans going forward. I think that is incredibly important.

3:40

Like, we're talking about a cut to MSI of 36 per cent, which is hundreds of millions of dollars. I mean, it's just significant. There's no way that municipalities will be able to fill that gap entirely with service cuts, and the services that we're talking about cutting are important services. You know, personally, I think it's important to pay for these services. I think that the clearing of roads and the policing of cities and the putting out of fires are very important services. I think we should care about them and we should be willing to fund them, and I think that most Albertans agree with me. I think that costs are going up. I mean, we've had conversations

about all sorts of different costs that are sort of weighing. It's sort of death by a thousand cuts for Albertans. They're going to see their property taxes . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so saddened to know that a speaker is cut off in mid-flight. I know that there was almost a mid-sentence stoppage to the words that were being so well prepared and delivered by the member who recently spoke to the bill. I'd like her to be allowed to continue and finish her thoughts if she would.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View with about four and a half left.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I will try to be more diligent about watching the time this time, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. Bill 56. The reason I think it ought to be referred to a committee for further consideration is to consider the impacts that these things will genuinely have on people's lives because, again, the services which municipalities have available to them to cut are pretty important services. They're services that I don't necessarily agree ought to be cut. Cities have taken over some provincial jurisdiction in providing certain supports and social services, and I think that withdrawing those services – for instance, they contribute to FCSS – at this time would be very, very bad.

I think, you know, roads and transit and parks and recreation and fire and police and water and snow removal are things that we're going to continue to need. We're going to continue to need to fund these things. Now, that isn't to say that there's never anything that can be looked at, but when you look at the cost of the cuts versus the total budgets of municipalities, there is no way to achieve it without deep cuts or else downloading those costs onto people. As I've been saying, at this time people are struggling. They're really struggling with the costs of things.

People in Calgary: I hear from my constituents every day on this. This isn't the time to be raising costs. This isn't the time to be raising costs on people. I think it's going to create more stress, it's going to create more bad situations for families here in Alberta, and it's ultimately going to cost us more in the long term because that stress and those people falling into poverty has an impact – it really does – on the lives of those people but on our entire communities as well.

One of the protective factors against those things is community. It is the building of community, and I think it is cities who have been working on that. Certainly, in Calgary there has been an enormous amount of work done around building communities that feel integrated, where everyone can come together, where everyone is included, and everyone is respected. I think that these cuts will impact that. They impact on Albertans and their lives by increasing their costs, by taking away their communities at a time when they can ill afford it, and I genuinely think that that is sad.

I think that this bill should be referred to a committee so we can consider what those impacts can be, so we can consider what the cumulative impact of this and so many other UCP decisions is going to be on these municipalities and ultimately on the families who are going to have to pay the higher property taxes to support these decisions, because I think that for many of those families that couple of hundred dollars a year more is going to be a really big deal. I think that that's going to be a challenge for a lot of people. I think it'll be a challenge for my constituents. I think it's something that we should further consider in advance of making any sort of

decision on this bill because, again, Albertans are not in a position to afford this.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that at the end of the day I urge all members – and I hope my colleagues will support this call – to refer this bill to a committee. I think it's worth taking the time to have the conversation to decide what the impacts are, and maybe the members opposite will still feel that those impacts are okay. Maybe they'll still be okay with rising property taxes and rising costs for their constituents. But I'd like the opportunity – and I'd like the opportunity to bring in witnesses – to try to convince them that that isn't okay.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. government deputy whip has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me and allowing me to speak on Bill 56, on this referral amendment. It's always a pleasure to rise in this House and respond to members opposite and some of their concerns. Often I think that they are genuine in their frustrations and their concerns, but I think some are equally misguided.

That is why I would like to begin my remarks by saying that I will not be supporting this referral amendment, and I would encourage my caucus colleagues as well in this Chamber and anyone who may be voting on this bill that they also not support this referral amendment. The reason why, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has taken steps since being elected in April 2019 to get the province back on track, to take into consideration the many concerns that Albertans had going into that election with the way the province had been managed for the previous four years under the NDP government. Now, again, I do say that understanding that members opposite did what they thought was best, so this is not me trying to cast aspersions. We simply see things differently.

But I do believe that this bill is a good piece of legislation aimed at ensuring that we are bringing our province in line with other jurisdictions across the country. For example, the federal government, through the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, has mandated that Canada's 911 system be upgraded to next generation 911, or NG911, technology by March 30, 2024. This is in line with other provinces and is crucial to cover the costs of the system upgrades. Saskatchewan, our neighbour to the east, has announced that their levy will be \$1.88 per month due to the differences in provincial systems. This is just one of many examples, Mr. Speaker, that this bill has taken into consideration. We are responding to the demands put on our province.

I also recognize that, again, this may not be popular with the members opposite, and they may take this time to stand up in this Chamber and throw every kind of piece of misinformation across the aisle, which tends to be commonplace. It is unfortunate because while I think there are things we will disagree on in this bill, I would also hope that there places where the members opposite might find some common ground, where they might actually feel like there are some good pieces of legislation, they can actually give credit where credit is due. I have been on record many times in this Chamber, standing and giving credit specifically to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for some of her work as minister of labour when she was in government. I would expect maybe some of the same courtesy from members opposite.

Now, I'm not holding my breath, but with that said, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks by simply saying this. I think this is a good piece of legislation. I'm grateful to the member for bringing

it forward, and I encourage other members in this Chamber to vote against this referral amendment but vote for the main bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

3:50

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues for this opportunity to engage in consideration of the referral. Right now I'm taking this time to respond to the comments of the previous speaker. I have to say that I would love to be able to come into this place and enthusiastically celebrate the work that the government is doing. I think that would be excellent. I was elected to come to this place and to advocate for the best interests of the people of Alberta, and that's what I will do. When the government gets it right, I will be happy to celebrate that. There's one example I can think of from Education, which was finally making the decision to make diploma exams optional for this year other than the summer period; they weren't optional for that. But those days seem to be fewer and further between.

It's an interesting thing for the deputy government whip to say that he comes into this place and celebrates the work of the former labour minister when pretty much all the labour bills have been working intentionally to undermine, to erode the protections that that minister put in place to protect workers, to make sure that there was more balance and more fairness. One of the earliest acts was to roll back the minimum wage for those who are under 18, making a totally different minimum wage, taking essentially \$2 out of the pockets of teenagers who – many right now, especially in the economy under the UCP, have to work to support their families, have to work to contribute to their own economic futures and well-being. For example, many of them that I represent talked to me about working in high school to save up for a car. Of course, car insurance has gone up considerably under this UCP government.

Many will also talk about working to save up for postsecondary. The government immediately eliminated the cap that was put in place on tuition. Also, the government got rid of the tax credits that used to be in place so that at least that student who was saving up or the parents who were helping to contribute or other family members could have a tax credit for making the decision to further themselves through postsecondary.

When I think about some of the actions that this government has taken, I would absolutely love to come here and be able to celebrate positive moves. This bill is not a positive move. This bill is downloading significant increases to ratepayers and property owners' taxes for the citizens of the province of Alberta. That's going to be the direct consequence of this bill. So I'm not going to come in here and congratulate the government on jacking up rates for property taxes. I'm not. I'm also not going to come in here and congratulate the government for going after every Albertan who has a cellphone to add a tax to be able to call 911. I'm not. Like, calling 911 should be a basic right that all Albertans have, without being taxed, in a case of an emergency.

When we come to this place and we say, "It'd be really nice if we had more of a culture of collaboration," you betcha it would. Right now the majority government has decided to bring forward a number of pieces of legislation that aren't collaborative, that are downright downloading significant cuts and impacts to municipalities and, in turn, to all of our voters. So I'm not going to come here and congratulate the government on downloading more costs onto ordinary families. I'm going to fight for ordinary families. I'm going to fight for the people that live across this province, in my constituency and in Cardston-Siksika. I'm going to make sure that

they have a voice in this place that's fighting for affordability, that's fighting for a better Alberta, that's fighting for justice.

It's not a supercomplicated call to say: don't tell me that I have to come in here and be a cheerleader for a government bill. Well, I guess maybe that's what the deputy whip likes to do, to tell people to be cheerleaders for government bills, but I'll tell you that this bill is not good. This bill is going to make life more difficult for all constituents, and it's going to make it harder for people to be able to make ends meet in this province. It's going to download more costs onto municipalities. It's going to mean fewer infrastructure projects in ridings right across this province, which means fewer jobs and fewer assets as well. So, no, I'm not going to come here, to the deputy government whip, to be a cheerleader for the government when I so rightfully disagree with the bill that this government has brought forward.

I certainly welcome an opportunity . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on REF1. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the Member for Calgary-Buffer Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak again to this bill, to the referral motion REF1, I think you said. I want to thank my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View for putting it together and referring it to a committee that I'm the vice-chair of. The last two years I've been the vice-chair of that committee, and I know that the committee members, all of them, are diligent in their activities. My sincere hope is that we can take this on and take a good run at all of the issues that are in Bill 56.

When I say "all of the issues," there are two big ones, obviously. The 911 call centres' funding – that is, changing the 911 act – which the deputy whip just a few moments ago spoke to almost exclusively with regard to the Bill 56 comments that he was making: it is entirely the smallest bit of this bad bill, as my colleague from Edmonton referenced it just a second ago. The biggest piece of it, the biggest bite that will be felt by municipalities across the province is not the \$41 million that's in this change to the 911 act. Of course, some of that will be borne by people who own cellphones in terms of increased costs, but there'll be a disbursement of some of that \$41 million to municipalities around the province. Don't get me wrong. I think the issues that the changes make to the 911 system are better as a result of that investment.

What does bother me, though, is the limited thought process that went into the disbursement, or the breaking out, of the funds. There was no thought given to the difficulties municipalities are having because there was, as I understand it, no offer from this government to front-end or to help with some of those costs for municipalities. They just layered them on – like, my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View talked about the layering of impacts of charges and costs onto municipalities and, ultimately, Albertans – and, you know, kind of keep their hands clean and say: we're not doing that; that's somebody else who will do it. That somebody else is going to be the bad guy in many of the eyes of local ratepayers, taxpayers, and that will be municipalities.

But the biggest part of this bill, that I certainly hope members of this Legislature refer to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, is around the local government fiscal framework changes: first, MSI, and then eventually the LGFF kicks in after a significant delay to municipalities. Why is it a good thing to refer this to committee? Well, you know, earlier today it was just introduced, the citizen initiative bill. The Justice minister stood up and talked about how good that will be and how important it is. That was the work of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

in terms of hearing from key stakeholders and expert witnesses, I guess you call them, people who the members of the committee said that we'd like to hear from. We want to understand their views on not only citizens' initiatives but the recall initiative that was introduced a couple of weeks ago in this House.

4:00

The way it worked was that four members of each side – sorry. There were four members of the opposition side who were there and about eight from the government, and we all got the opportunity to suggest stakeholders and key respondents to come to that committee. Four each, is what I'm trying to say. We all put their names into a hat, and they came and talked to us at committee.

Now, some people had – well, there was a divergence of views, is what I would say. I certainly appreciated some of the views shared. Others I think were plants for the government side in terms of: we want this; we want that. It wasn't that useful in terms of listening to all of them, but it was a process that the committee could use once again and come back to this House, having heard and understood, actually understood, the impacts that the changes to MSI and the local government fiscal framework will have on municipalities and, secondarily, the 911 act charges.

Now, if we did that, I think that it wouldn't be too long before we would hear from municipal leaders, whether they be elected to the associations that represent municipalities both at the rural side and the urban side, RMA and AUMA, things like, you know: "This is a significant impact. We weren't involved in the discussions. We are more recipients of having to accept what the government says will be our new fiscal framework arrangement with government." I think that what we would find is that it was a one-way discussion, with the government saying: this is going to be the arrangement.

There are no validators that I'm aware of from the government of Alberta for Bill 56 on the changes to MSI and the LGFF. There is no one standing up and saying, you know: "We want this. Let's have it. We want a reduction of a third of a billion dollars for needed capital projects in our municipalities. Let's have that. We think that that makes good sense for municipalities, and we're signed up." There was nothing in terms of any of the press releases that I'm aware of that came with Bill 56 around the reduction of a third of a billion dollars to MSI over the next few years. What there was – and I review and probably other people here review the newsletters from both of those associations – in the papers with respect to mayors and councils speaking out against these reductions, what I was aware of was that there was not agreement, there was not support for what's before us in Bill 56.

The bill in the previous, back in Budget '19, the statutes of Alberta, 2019 – and you can see it on page 2 here. It says: "Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to a new funding framework for local governments beginning in the 2022-2023 fiscal year." We know that that's delayed for two years now, so a two-year delay in this new fiscal framework with municipalities, and the municipalities have to put up with it. They have no say.

Go further down, and you see that the amount of money in subsection (2) is struck from \$2,500,973,000, and a substitute number is put in there at \$2.166 billion. That's a change of \$334,973,000, or just over a third of a billion dollars' reduction, to municipalities. And what's that mean for municipalities? Well, it means that they have a lot less money to work with, obviously, but it also means that the leveraging power of those dollars is lost. Municipalities are able to leverage up a significant, significant amount by going to the federal government, working with federal governments, going to private interests. Many times you work with a private interest who's not totally responsible for something like an adjoining roadway or a roadway near them that they want done,

but the city can bring in money or the municipality can bring in money to help address that, build that roadway. Then they'll go to the private person, and they'll say: look, you benefit to a degree; help us with this. The total amount of money, that was originally \$2,000,593,000, is changed and lessened, and our communities are worse off.

Now, I certainly understand that the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton are, you know, very good at negotiating, but it looks like they were very surprised by the striking out of \$455 million. That's a significant amount of money that would go to them, and they would split those monies on a formula basis. It's \$73 million less with this bill. Now, I know they weren't pleased with it. They weren't happy with it, but that's what is happening. There's a two-year delay in that money as well. The rest of the province, other municipalities have a \$405 million original amount, that is now struck to \$340 million, a \$65 million difference. Together those differences are about a \$138 million reduction, Mr. Speaker, each year. As I said, that's about a third of a billion dollars over three years.

Now, my colleagues, both from Edmonton and Calgary, have talked about a number of things that will suffer as a result of the changes being proposed in Bill 56, and I think it is helpful to find out directly from those who are impacted what that means. We stand up and say: well, we think it means that taxpayers, ultimately, at the local level will have to pay the price. We know that with less money there's either less service provision, so services at the local level are cut, or there are increases to taxes to pay for the existing services that don't get cut. Where did municipalities get the opportunity to explain that to their provincial government? This referral gives them that opportunity.

I know that members of the Legislature, you know, all receive a great deal of feedback from our constituents, but this kind of thing is more inside baseball with governments. It doesn't show up right away for constituents. It doesn't show up until they get the word from their city or municipal leaders that we're going to have to cut back on garbage collection, we're going to have to look at the local services in your community, things like water parks or pools or recreation centres. You know, in non-COVID times those were very busy. They're not busy right now for obvious reasons, but when things like that change, people look around, and they blame the local councils.

Local councils try and explain that they have these relationships with government. They have funding relationships. They try and work these out. They want to be respected as an order of government who knows how to deal with their local citizenry and the provision of services that they require. But when they get this laid on them in the Legislature with likely little kind of discussion and certainly no revision to any of these dates, they can rightly be disturbed. And they can rightly point out that we're having difficulty because they are making it – "they" being the UCP government – intolerable to have a relationship of responsibility.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I believe the hon. member who caught my eye was the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to quickly again respond to, you know, the member from Calgary and a few other members on the opposition side. They have talked about Bill 56 and indeed the referral amendment on the floor of this Assembly. I think, once again, it's important that we focus our attention on what this bill actually does in the midst of the economic crisis that we face in this province, the economic, fiscal, and financial crisis that

we inherited from the previous NDP government, made worse by the pandemic and the collapse of oil prices. The member that just concluded his speech was the Minister of Finance in this province between 2015 and 2019, until the NDP was defeated, and, I will add, the worst Minister of Finance in the history of our province.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. I see the Opposition House Leader has risen.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just clearly under 23(h), (i), (j), most of them. Truly, we are having obviously very different perspectives on policy, but it has been a respectful debate up until now. I would request that through this point of order you may direct the Deputy Government House Leader to engage in debate in a way that does not use insulting language of a nature to create disorder. I think we can elevate the quality of the debate in this Chamber, and name-calling is not one of the tools we should be using.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Justice has risen to reply.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, while I certainly share the Opposition House Leader's commitment to language that does not cause disorder in this Assembly, I disagree with her, however, that my reference to the former minister is something that would cause disorder in this Assembly. That is a phrase that the members opposite have repeatedly used in this Assembly, so that is not a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I am prepared to rule. At this stage I do not find that there is a point of order. That said, I would say that it seems perhaps that it is a matter of debate, but again I would remind all members in this House that the goal here is to have useful and spirited debate. I would remind all members to perhaps choose their words wisely in order to ensure that their debate does not inflame or lead to disorder in the House.

At this stage I would ask the hon. Minister of Justice to continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The local measures act supports Budget 2021 by extending MSI funding to 2023-2024 to provide front-loaded and flexible capital funding for municipalities, and I think that is a good thing for our municipalities, rather than, you know, confronting the consequences of the previous government's policies while they were in office.

As I alluded to earlier on, Mr. Speaker, that Finance minister presided over a government that ran deficits for the four years they were in office, multibillion-dollar deficits. That Finance minister presided over a government that inherited a combined \$13.9 billion in provincial debt, province-wide debt. They racked it up to almost \$70 billion. That Finance minister wants to talk to us about how to build communities and financial responsibility. That was how we got here.

The province was unprepared for the challenges of this pandemic fiscally as a consequence of the policies of that Finance minister and the previous government. Mr. Speaker, while other provinces in this country were making sure that they prepared their province for times of uncertainty and unforeseen circumstances, Alberta,

under the NDP, was not prepared for that for they racked up debt and deficit as if we plucked money from trees. It's no wonder that when we got sworn in in 2019, we were confronted with difficult choices, difficult choices of making sure that we rebuild our economy to make sure that we are able to afford and pay for all of the great programs and services that the people of Alberta rely on. Someone needs to tell the NDP that money doesn't grow on trees.

Mr. Speaker, by the way, also, you know, we lost more than 20 per cent of government revenue, again, as a consequence of policies pursued by the previous government when they were in office. For example, they brought in a multibillion-dollar carbon tax that they never campaigned for – multibillion-dollar – that enabled businesses to flee from our province, businesses that would today be paying taxes, adding to the revenue. As a consequence of their policies thousands of Albertans lost their jobs, jobs that would have enabled the province to earn taxes. Because of the policies of the previous government . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on REF1, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill and particularly to this amendment because I certainly support the idea that this bill was ill thought out and needs to be sent to committee, where some people who have the intent to make it better can do so. It certainly is one of the many bills brought forward by this government that just simply shows a lack of planning, a lack of thoughtfulness, a lack of consultation, and a lack of foresight in terms of the work done before the bill arrived in the House.

Of course, I'm very concerned that it continues their ongoing attack on municipalities in this province. That has been well enumerated, but perhaps I'll take a second to do that.

We know that the municipalities have had to deal with assaults on their linear assessment, which means a reduction of their ability to raise funds to pay for things. We know that they've had to deal with an imposed tax holiday on some of the major companies that provide taxes for municipalities by this government. The imposition of a holiday, again, has reduced the income of these municipalities to be able to provide services. We know that this government has decreased the grants in lieu of paying for provincial buildings in these municipalities instead of paying property taxes but paying the grants. That has been reduced, so they're not contributing themselves to the municipal governments. We know that they have increased the police services without increasing the amount of money contributed to those municipalities so that they are providing more RCMP but actually putting a hundred per cent of that cost on the municipalities.

4:20

A continual list of attacks on municipalities' ability to balance their budgets, a continued list of attacks on municipalities to provide the services that are most needed by people in the community. I mean, we know those services are very important. We know those services are about roads and sewers and garbage pickup and other things that are critically important on a day-to-day basis for citizens in this province, and this government has repeatedly attacked them.

In this particular bill, which certainly should be referred to committee, a committee which I sit on and therefore would take due diligence to make sure that good questions were asked and good people were brought into the committee to help provide us some information – this referral is very important in terms of correcting some of these terrible assaults on municipalities.

I mean, it was just last spring that I was standing out in front of this very Legislature with mayors and reeves and councillors from across this province who would come to tell us how disastrous this government's policies have been in terms of the viability even of their municipalities, some of the councillors and mayors and reeves telling me that they would have to increase their tax rate by upwards of 200 per cent in order to pay the bills that they can no longer pay because this government has made these horrible decisions and imposed those decisions on the municipalities.

We have to ask ourselves: why is it that this government would do this kind of thing? Why would they use this bill to take away more money from people who are already deeply stressed at being able to provide the services? What we find out is that it turns out the reason why is that this government has to make up for its long series of significant financial disasters. This government has constantly preached to this side of the House about the fact that we had, during some difficult times, put some deficit on the books. We appreciate that. We understood that. We set a path to balance, and we followed that path to balance for four years, and indeed we met our mark every single year. In fact, we exceeded the mark toward balance in every year that we were in government.

Now, in contrast, this particular government has done exactly the opposite. They came in saying: we don't want deficits. What do they do? They had the largest single-year deficit that this province has ever seen.

Ms Hoffman: Ever.

Mr. Feehan: Ever. In the history of the province of Alberta they have the highest debt this province has ever had. Historically they are the least successful government that we have ever seen in the hundred-plus years of this province. [interjections] By all records – and I know that they're yelling from across the floor because the facts always disturb them. They're always upset by the fact that the numbers show that while they complain about deficits, they create bigger ones. While they complain about debt, they create bigger ones. While they complain about unemployment, they create . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. However, I believe that I think it's a good opportunity to just remind all members that the individual with the call at this stage is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. There will of course be an opportunity for a 29(2)(a) should you want to catch my eye or make that effort once the 15 minutes is complete.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford could please continue.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the government side of the House likes to make mocking comments because they have nothing left.

Ms Goodridge: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: I see a point of order has been called. I see the hon. member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder Imputing Motives

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to call a point of order on 23(h), (i), (j). The comments made clearly were set to cause disorder in this House and impute false motives on members of the government, so I would implore you to consider this a point of order.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I see the hon. Opposition House Leader has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In responding to this point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), I certainly agree that we need to have a high level of decorum in this place, but I do not think that this is a point of order. What I just heard was literally the members of the government heckling and yelling at the current speaker, and then he described that behaviour. It was factual. It was what was happening here in this Chamber.

I think that as we continue to talk about the record of this government and what is currently happening when it comes to debt and deficit, we've seen a pattern where government members get quite heated during this debate. I think that we are dealing with a matter of debate at this point and that the member did not refer to any individual person but was speaking to the behaviour of the government, not intending to create disorder but really pointing out the behaviour that was taking place in this Chamber.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a point of order but a part of the debate that is taking place in this House. I would certainly hope that we can continue to talk about Bill 56, which has dramatic implications on our municipalities and deserves that full consideration of both the referral amendment that we are currently speaking to and the bill itself. I look forward to your ruling on this, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I am prepared to rule on this. At this stage I do not find that this is a point of order. I do want to take again the opportunity, though, to remind all members that should they choose language that will lead towards disorder in the House, of course, in the future that could become a point of order.

What I would also do is that I would take this opportunity to just remind all members that we are talking about REF1 right now, so if we could please, with an eye for relevance of the comments that are being made, do your best to return to the topic at hand, which, again, is REF1. Again, no point of order.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen to continue, with about eight minutes and 45 remaining.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to go further in terms of my arguments for why we should be referring this particular bill to committee. We know, clearly, that this government needs help and support in getting things right. We know that their primary difficulty as a government has been that they have been unable to make reasonable and appropriate financial decisions, which I've demonstrated time and time again, as I've articulated in terms of the numbers in terms of things like debt, deficit, unemployment rates. We know that they have made very poor financial decisions in a number of other ways in terms of giving away \$4.7 billion in tax breaks to foreign corporations, who then use that money to actually move head offices out of the province.

You know, they constantly repeat the trope that somehow the very good carbon levy that was introduced in this province by the previous government somehow chased industry out of the province, yet there is no evidence that that ever happened, but they repeat it because they actually do not understand how financial decisions are made by corporations. That's demonstrated time and time again.

You know, they brought in lots of advice from numerous sources around the world on how to make better financial decisions. This government has rejected all of them. Financially this government is indeed, by the numbers, the government that has had the greatest

amount of difficulty of doing what they actually purport to say that they want to do. It is time, then, that we refer it to committee so that someone who has a better understanding of finances can help instruct this government about how they can proceed in a way that does not damage the communities throughout the province of Alberta, that does not damage every single municipality, which is going to experience a significant decrease in their MSI, which ultimately, really, is about a 36 per cent cut in terms of the funds from their government and is not being replaced by the LGFF for two years, leaving them with a huge gap in their ability to provide services. This is very problematic.

4:30

This is a government that doesn't understand how anybody else actually balances their budget. They deindexed AISH and they changed the date payment for AISH without any consideration about how that affects the budgeting of individuals who are on AISH. They don't really care, don't really know. I don't know. I can't ascribe a motive to this government, but I can tell you that the net result was disastrous for everybody else's budget, just as this bill will be disastrous for the budget of every municipality. We know that they have deindexed our taxes. While they say that they don't want to raise taxes, this bill introduces a new tax. They deindexed the personal income tax grid so that every single citizen in the province of Alberta is paying more taxes. You just can't listen to what they say around finances because they really don't understand finances. They really are significantly bereft in terms of a grasp of the consequence of the financial decisions that they make, and that's what we need to correct by sending this particular bill to committee.

I have some suggestions for this government. If they really are looking for ways to save some money, then I would suggest that perhaps they might want to look at things like the anti-Alberta energy campaigns that they put on, with \$305 million given to Tom Olsen to delay a report three times. They had to increase his money for a report that any average university student or master's student could have produced in one semester. Instead, they are wasting that money and not receiving any product at all. We have nothing to show for the money that's been provided to that committee.

How about saving the money or redirecting it toward 911 from the war room, the Canadian Energy Centre; \$30 million a year is put into that that could have been put toward 911 instead of using that centre for who knows what purpose. They have set it up so that as citizens of the province of Alberta we can't even analyze whether the money was used properly or not. This is what this government does because they either don't understand finances or they do understand and they know that the citizens of the province of Alberta would be disgusted to find out what they're doing with the money. So they've hidden that away from our supervision and oversight.

If they wanted to really help people and they really wanted to make the 911 system a better system, rather than raise taxes on everybody, they could have taken money that they are wasting year after year after year on apparently no product. Nothing has come out of this. We have no benefit. The only person that has benefited from that war room is a Belgian filmmaker, who has thanked the government for increasing his personal revenues dramatically. I guess that's nice, but it sure as heck doesn't help anybody in the province of Alberta. It doesn't help the cause that they purport to say that they support.

Instead, what it does: again, it's another situation where they have shipped the money from Alberta out of the province into somebody else's pocket. That's what they've done, the same way they have done with all of their various schemes, like their outrageous bet on the outcome of the presidential election in the United States, when

they could have simply waited till now to make a decision about investment. They could have waited till today, where we know the outcome of the presidential election. There was nothing that forced them to act at the time they acted, but they did because they actually don't get economics. We have seen that repeated time and time again.

So it does make sense to take a bill that deals with economics, not just their economics but the economics of all the municipalities, and refer it to a committee so that we can bring in people who do understand economics, who do understand finances and ask them to provide direction to this lost government, to this government that has demonstrated repeatedly since the day they arrived that they don't get it.

You know, one of the very first things that they did was that they cancelled programs, like the indigenous climate leadership initiative, that were providing jobs in every single First Nation in this province. Their first bill cancelled all of those jobs and many jobs that were associated with it. Those are the kind of decisions that they've been making. The net result, of course, is that they're the government with the worst rate of unemployment that this province has seen in many, many years, perhaps generations, the second-highest level of unemployment in the country of Canada right now. That's the consequence. They don't like it when I say these things because they're actual measurable numbers.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe the hon. member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to correct the record after that ridiculous diatribe though I find it amusing that someone like the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford would stand up and accuse this government of not having any sense of – what is the word here? – reasonable and appropriate financial decision-making. Man, that's rich. On this side of the House we will not take any lessons from members opposite on how to manage the finances of the province of Alberta. On this side of the House we'll not take any lessons from members opposite on how to protect Alberta businesses and what's in the best interests of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite from Edmonton-Rutherford suggested that we should be referring this to committee so we can let other people who have better financial acumen deliberate this bill. So you mean members of this Chamber in a committee. Okay. How about this? If the members opposite don't trust this government to manage the finances of this province and recognize that this province is on a trajectory upwards, maybe, just maybe, they might take the words from the Conference Board of Canada – the Conference Board of Canada – or maybe Scotiabank or maybe ATB, all who projected Alberta to lead the country in economic growth coming out of the global pandemic. [interjections] I hear the members opposite heckling, asking for . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, there have been a few times where I've had to stand up. The person, the individual, the member with the call at this time under 29(2)(a) is the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. I think we're having a spirited debate, but simply because somebody, a member, does not agree with what is being stated in the debate does not necessarily automatically give them the right to have the call. There will be other opportunities to discuss this REF1. As well, there will be other 29(2)(a)s.

The individual currently under 29(2)(a) who has the call is the Member for Cardston-Siksika, with about three minutes and 23 seconds left. Please continue.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oh, the chorus of heckling from the members opposite. They should start a choir. It's like

music to my ears because it tells me that I'm saying something right. It tells me that I'm on the right track, just like the province of Alberta, on the way up, projected by three major institutions – the Conference Board of Canada, ATB, and Scotiabank – to lead the country in economic growth. So it's rich. And it's too bad the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford won't be able to respond to my comments if I was to sit down at this exact moment. Go for it.

But I'll tell you this. I'm not going to sit here and not respond to that nonsense. I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker. Members on this side of the House take very seriously the responsibility entrusted to us by Albertans to lead this province through this difficult time . . .

Member Ceci: So listen to the munis.

Mr. Schow: . . . to regroup after four years of NDP mismanagement. I hear again the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, which is also rich considering that that member was the worst Finance minister in the history of the province.

4:40

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. I see the Opposition House Leader has risen.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This may sound a little familiar, but under 23(h), (i), and (j) again we see the government members, in an effort to make their point, resorting to name-calling. I believe the member started off fairly well, quoting factual data from third-party sources to make his argument. That, to me, seems reasonable, but name-calling within this Chamber does not seem to me to be raising the decorum and contributing to a good debate. I believe that that was abusive and insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Now, I begin by mentioning, Mr. Speaker, that you may find this familiar because this exact same language was used in an earlier point of order, and at that time you chose to issue a caution, which I think was very appropriate. In this case, given the repeated use of name-calling, I would suggest that this is a point of order. We should discourage this type of language while we are attempting to have a fulsome debate on policy differences between members of the government and members of the opposition.

With that, I would submit to you that this is a point of order, and I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Justice has risen to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is not a point of order. I recognize that earlier on you provided a caution that the members of this Assembly should not use abusive language that is likely to cause disorder before this Assembly during the course of debate, but Standing Order 23 is quite clear in the interpretation that this Assembly and indeed similar assemblies across the Commonwealth have provided in that this provision does not lead to the conclusion that the phrase used by the Member for Cardston-Siksika amounted to an infraction under section 23 of the standing orders.

With that, Mr. Speaker, this is a point of debate and not a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I will take this opportunity to reiterate my caution with regard to the language used

in this Assembly. At this stage I do not find that there is a point of order. However, I would also reiterate, from that previous time that a similar point of order was called but still not found to be a point of order, that I think all members should do their best to ensure that we focus on the topic at hand, which is REF1.

Currently the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has one minute and 52 seconds left, should he choose to take it, under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Schow: Plenty of time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. A familiar point of order, a familiar ruling: not guilty.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I'd also, as I said before, give credit where credit is due. The Deputy Opposition House Leader stated in her point of order that I began my remarks by citing factual data from a third-party source. Imagine that, corroborating something that I had said, stating it was factual data, contradicting what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had said. [interjections]

Furthermore, as they heckle me, I'm going to talk louder, because at six-foot nine I guess I can talk louder. I don't know. But if the Member for Calgary-Buffalo wants to heckle what I'm saying, then he should be prepared for what comes back, which is maybe a matter of debate, but people on this side of the House and Albertans on April 16 stated that he was the worst Finance minister in the history of this province.

Statement by the Speaker

Decorum

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. However, I do believe that we are pushing ourselves quite close to a situation which may cause disorder with regard to the language being used. I would take this opportunity to remind members that our debates in this House should be focused, in my thoughts, on the policies that are in place or potentially in place through legislation, not on personalities.

The hon. member has 43 seconds left under Standing Order 29(2)(a) should he choose to take it.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I will take your caution under advisement.

I'll finish by saying this. I recognize that it is becoming very spirited in here and verging on, I guess, disorderly. Maybe I can partially take some responsibility for that, but I'd ask the members opposite to do the same. To hear the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford get up in his speech for 15 minutes and say the things that he had said, most of which were entirely baseless, warrants a response. Similar to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who responded to my remarks saying that she would not sit there and listen to me, I had to respond as well.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I would also take this opportunity to say that in my cautions I was of course referring to all members in the House.

Joining debate on REF1, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to correct what's already on record, what I said was that I wish I could come to this place and congratulate the government on more bills or more government policies that I felt were going to benefit Albertans. For

the Member for Cardston-Siksika to come and tell us that we should be coming here to applaud the government when the legislation that we're here to consider, Bill 56, the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, so clearly will actually download more burdens onto everyday families in our province, will so clearly negatively impact our communities and the assets that we have in our communities, the government is not going to get a pat on the back from this member or anyone else. Speaking to government policy, that's exactly what this bill is going to do.

I also want to correct the misinformation that the last speaker, the Member for Cardston-Siksika, just said when he referred to: well, going to committee just means that you're taking a smaller group of MLAs and letting them make the decisions. What it actually has done, in my experience – and this is directly what the referral motion is, referring this to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship – is that it creates an opportunity for a smaller group of MLAs to liaise with experts that are directly impacted by the proposed legislation, to gather feedback from diverse perspectives of experts who will be directly impacted by the proposed legislation.

Definitely, we've already heard from many municipal leaders outside of this Chamber, but it actually creates an opportunity for their voices to be brought into the legislative process. Not literally into this Chamber, but it moves this bill from this point in time to a committee to examine the impacts of the proposed government legislation. Then the committee can bring forward recommendations on how to improve things.

If we're to take a trip back just to this time last year, the government rushed through I believe it was Bill 10, which was a bill that had significant negative public backlash about the overreach that the government was taking. If the government would have heeded the recommendation to consider referring to committee at that time, we would have prevented legal cases from rising up. We would have prevented the loss of time, because eventually what did happen was that the Premier did determine that a committee did need to review that legislation and come up with amendments to bring something forward to this Assembly that would have a greater chance of support from all members and support from the public and ultimately wouldn't tie the province down in court challenges for years to come.

We're in a similar situation, Mr. Speaker, where we have an opportunity to pause, send this to committee, take a sober second thought, process the impacts of the legislation, and determine the best path forward. Absolutely, experts would be invited to that committee if the committee members so choose. That's what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was referring to, the opportunity to engage with more experts.

I do have faith that committees can work effectively if all committee members want them to work effectively. To have the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul as part of this committee, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, Airdrie-Cochrane, Calgary-Glenmore, Central Peace-Notley, Calgary-East, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, Calgary-North, Calgary-Buffalo, Edmonton-McClung, Edmonton-Rutherford, and Calgary-Mountain View: I think that that has the potential to be the right place to take this bill, which I believe right now has significant negative consequences for Albertans, the people we are here to represent.

4:50

To gather feedback from expert testimony and to gather feedback from folks who will live the consequences of this legislation and to consider ways that we can amend it together to bring back something to this place that won't be damaging to the people of Alberta: that's exactly what this amendment proposes, that's exactly what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was speaking

to, and I think that most of us in this place are happy to roll our sleeves up on committees and do good work to try to make things a little bit better, to feel like we are all involved in the process. Sometimes cabinet puts forward ideas that simply just aren't going to benefit the people of Alberta and therefore aren't of benefit to the MLAs of this place because our job is, of course, to come here to fight to make life a little bit better for the people that we're all here to serve. This certainly would create an opportunity for folks to gather feedback.

Regularly, when I go door-knocking or even when I'm phoning, people will want to talk to me about municipal issues when I'm calling as a provincial politician, and often I'll say: thanks so much for your feedback; that's a municipal issue; I'll be happy to refer your concerns to our municipal councillor that overlaps with this area, and they would be the appropriate body to follow up. That's often with things like potholes or road maintenance, municipal services like libraries and rec centres and community assets through community leagues, for example. But this bill, actually, means that a lot of that responsibility is going to rest on this government's shoulders because this bill intentionally, significantly cuts funding to municipalities. You can bet that when I'm door-knocking in my riding or any riding in this province and somebody starts talking about their roads and the lack of infrastructure maintenance done to their roads, there's absolutely a direct connection between decisions that this government is making and those local issues that used to at one time be considered municipal issues. This government is intentionally undermining the assets and the resources that municipalities have to maintain their municipalities and their infrastructure.

It reminds me, actually, of how I guess not quite a year ago there were many parts around this city where public lands' grasses weren't being cut, for example, and there were a lot of political staff from within the government, UCP staff, either caucus or government employed, who decided to take shots at local elected officials here in Edmonton, saying: cut the grass. At the same time, the government that they worked for was cutting their grants in place of taxes, the compensation directly to municipalities for the services that they need for government buildings, buildings like the one we're in today, buildings like the Law Courts, buildings like seniors' housing that is publicly supported, cutting grants in place of taxes, failing to meet their commitments to the partners in local government, cutting funding that was given directly to big cities through the big-city charter process that the now Premier absolutely promised he would keep intact during the election campaign. He said that he liked the big cities; he thought it was a fair agreement; he was going to keep it.

Then what has he done? He completely broke his word on that. He broke that promise, rolled that legislation back, and that absolutely had a significant negative impact, especially on Calgary and Edmonton and, I would argue, the surrounding municipalities that rely on Calgary and Edmonton for a lot of services. And, I would argue, having been a rural kid growing up in the north, we would access a lot of services in Edmonton, too, so when you attack the core foundation of funding for Calgary and Edmonton, it has a ripple effect and impacts every municipality.

This bill goes one step further. This bill actually cuts MSI funding for municipalities across the board. Everyone in the province is going to see significant reductions to the money that they had available to them to help them build their infrastructure, maintain their infrastructure, and support their communities. I doubt that when MLAs go home to their ridings or visit other people's ridings, people will say: "You know what we have too much of? Municipal infrastructure. You know what we have too much of? We have too many roads." I can tell you that when I've spent time visiting many

communities, especially in the north, one of the number one things they talk about is the need for expanded roads, the need for improved maintenance to roads. These are core issues around being able to connect with one another and being able to access services as people who live in rural or in urban centres.

When the government erodes funding to support infrastructure projects like roads, they are absolutely ignoring the cost from municipal leaders and from residents of municipalities to make sure that they're keeping up with their infrastructure commitments. We saw this before. We saw this especially in the 1990s, when we saw deep and brutal cuts that undermined the integrity of our assets here in the province, and some of them we have still failed to ever catch up on.

To say that – not wanting to engage in any of the specific name-calling rhetoric that was spoken by the last speaker during 29(2)(a) but wanting to correct the record, I have to say that I am incredibly proud that we had a government and a Finance minister that invested in countercyclical financing, which was recommended by a former governor for the Bank of Canada, to make sure that Albertans could keep working and that we were getting a good return on investment. When times are tough, you get often a better deal on infrastructure projects than when times are booming and you're competing with other sectors, including the oil sands, for the same skilled trades workers.

I have to say that I am incredibly proud that we had a Finance minister who set forth a path that cut child poverty in this province in half. I'm incredibly proud that we had a Finance minister who presented budgets that invested in schools, invested in hospitals, a long-overdue Calgary cancer centre that many Conservative governments had neglected and had dithered on, that that moved forward, and at the same time that there was a decision made to take some borrowing and to put it towards these kinds of projects to help families and to keep our economy moving.

This government has absolutely taken a different direction. They've decided to give billions of dollars – the last reported number in any of their budgets was \$4.7 billion – to large, profitable corporations making profits in excess of \$500,000 per year. Only large, profitable corporations. They also have chosen to gamble \$1.3 billion on the re-election of Donald Trump – at least \$1.3 billion; \$1.3 billion that we know of so far – and they've also continued down a path of investing public funds in an energy war room, a vanity project for some. When I talk to folks across the province about the choices that this government is making, the feedback is overwhelmingly negative, especially about the energy war room.

For them to know that the government is choosing to cancel infrastructure projects for their communities, for their municipalities and prioritize a vanity project that has been a national and international embarrassment on more than one occasion, I think that is speaking to values, priorities, and intent of this government. The policies that are flowing from that, including this bill here today, don't speak well for the government's path to support municipalities, support local infrastructure, and ensure that the people of this province have an opportunity to live, work, and play in strong communities. And they also – while they cut many of those infrastructure projects – will result in taxes going up locally and ratepayers, property tax payers having to pay significantly more.

Additionally, at the same time that the government is making all of these choices, they are running deficits far bigger than any government in the history of Alberta has ever run – it's a fact: almost as big in this single year as the four years under the NDP combined – and jobs have gone down. Even before the last rush, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 50,000 jobs lost in the province of Alberta between the first time the government

decided to give money away to large, profitable corporations and when COVID hit.

I know that at times it's fun to try to revisit history and to say that the impacts of decisions that the government of today, the current government, is making are not their fault, but the impacts are real, the impacts hurt families, the impacts hurt our communities, and the government needs to take some ownership for that. They need to say: these are our priorities; this is what we put at the highest. Giving money away to large, profitable corporations: that's number one. We all know that. We've all seen that bill and bill again, budget and budget again. But to continue to evade the realities that these kinds of cuts will have on communities, I think, is a disservice to this place and a disservice to the people of Alberta.

5:00

One of the proposals we have – that's why we're presenting this referral – is to call forward experts, to create a committee – the committee has already been created. Refer this bill to the appropriate committee, have the committee call forward experts, bring forward ideas, do some analysis, and if at the end of the day you still feel like this is the right way to move forward, at least you'll have some people who are willing to validate for you because they've come to the committee and they've testified. At this point it doesn't seem likely. It seems really damaging.

That isn't to speak just to the one – and I know it's small, so a lot of people gloss over it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe the hon. member who caught my eye is the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: For clarity, this is 29(2)(a) as well.

Mr. Madu: Correct. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I feel compelled to once again respond to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Members in this Assembly will recall that that member was the Deputy Premier between 2015 and 2019, when our province experienced the worst economic disaster in our province's history, a period where a government of a resource-rich province pursued policies that devastated the most vital economic interests of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the people of our province are tuning in to this debate, and they can see through the substance of this debate. The truth is that the bill before us, the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, you know, seeks to align government priorities with Budget 2021. I heard the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talk about Bill 10. Bill 10 was not a budget bill. I think it's important to remind the members opposite of the difference in those two pieces of legislation. The budget bill has already been tabled on the floor of this Assembly, and therefore it is highly inappropriate for the Member for Edmonton-Glenora to be comparing this particular bill to Bill 10.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Number two, Mr. Speaker, you know, in 2020 this government dedicated \$500 million in a municipal stimulus program to help our municipalities recover from the consequences of this pandemic. It is rich for the members opposite to stand on the floor of this Assembly to talk to us about infrastructure. We did that to make sure that municipalities across our province are going to be able to respond to this pandemic, the likes of which we have never seen in our lifetime.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora talks about, you know, the worst deficit in Alberta's history. We are dealing with a pandemic that has caused so much damage, a pandemic that Alberta was unprepared for financially because of the policies pursued by the members opposite when that Member for Edmonton-Glenora was the Deputy Premier who presided over the most reckless economic policies in our province's history.

Mr. Speaker, you know, libraries. Guess what? The libraries across this province have been funded at a hundred per cent by this government. As a former Minister of Municipal Affairs I know that too well.

Mr. Speaker, you know, they talk about the 911 levy. This was something that was imposed upon our province by the federal government, through the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, to upgrade 911 so that the people of our province would have better services. This is something that is not only limited to Alberta. Other provinces are following through with similar programs in their budgets.

No wonder, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite have no clue what it means to run sound financial policies. We will not make the mistake that led Alberta to be unprepared for a pandemic we have never seen before. We will pursue sound economic policies. The people of Alberta understand that our province is going through serious economic hard times, and they want to make sure that we are able to recover. There is more than \$10 billion in capital infrastructure that communities across our province are going to benefit from.

I know the member opposite's alternative is to raise taxes, more debt and deficit. That's the recipe for economic disaster. We have tried that before. We will not do that again for the sake of our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on REF1 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again we're hearing from the other side that progressive policy, to them, means just simply raising taxes. That's how they interpret everything, but this is not that. This is about the priorities of the government and where they are investing in Albertans – and I'm going to stress this again – because what's happening here is that the reality is that they're taking money away from the pockets of Albertans. They're having to pay for these fees. This is why it's so important that we refer this bill to committee. I think it's absolutely essential that we get other stakeholders, people who are going to be directly impacted by the decisions that this government is making, get their feedback on this particular piece of legislation. What's the problem with that?

I can't tell you the number of times, Mr. Speaker, when the members that are currently sitting on that side of the House were on this side of the House would use the same argument with us: "Let's send it to committee. Let's send it to committee." And here we are. You know, they like to get up, and they state that this is, like, sound financial policy, yet debt is growing, deficit is growing, and fewer and fewer of the taxpayer dollars are actually going to benefit Albertans and the services that they require. You can't have it both ways. You can't say that you're here governing for the benefit of Albertans while the debt continues to grow.

Then Albertans are asking themselves: okay; well, if the debt is continuing to grow but we're not getting the services and programs that were previously being offered, then where is the money going? Again, Mr. Speaker, I stress that it's about priorities, and this government has chosen to prioritize, number one, giving money to corporations because they continue to believe in this outdated

economic approach that by just giving money to corporations, somehow that's going to miraculously create more jobs on the ground. What we're seeing is that over the last several months, since this government has actually taken power and they decided to use this particular economic approach, instead of jobs being created, these corporations are actually leaving this jurisdiction, going to other jurisdictions, and investing those taxpayer dollars that are Alberta taxpayer dollars. They're fleeing with them from our beloved province, something that this government has to take responsibility for.

5:10

How can you call that sound financial, political decision-making? You gave money. You gave tax – okay. I'm in agreement with the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. You have made an ideological decision that has resulted in zero jobs, that is not helping Albertans. At the end of the day, Albertans are not getting the same amount of services and programs that they were getting under the previous government.

I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for reminding us in this House that under the previous government we were able to reduce child poverty by 50 per cent in this province. Think about that for a moment. Think about what is being said there: reducing child poverty by 50 per cent in this province. Because of the priorities that our budget, by the previous Finance minister, the decisions that were made by the previous government and the previous Finance minister, we reduced child poverty by 50 per cent in this province. That is something to be applauded. That is noble. I want you to imagine for a second each one of those children, each one of those children that now are no longer living in poverty.

Ms Hoffman: They weren't.

Member Loyola: They were, and then they were taken out of there.

Ms Hoffman: We'll see where they are now.

Member Loyola: Well, yeah. Exactly.

Those are real people – real people – Albertans, that we are here to work for. When you put your ideological approach – as much as you want to believe in it, at the end of the day, the numbers are what – I don't know what it is. Like, I get it; you're looking at the bottom line. You're looking at the bottom line. This is why it's so important to refer this bill to committee, because the ideological decision that you're making to cut funding to municipalities – I know that you're cutting. I get what you're trying to do. You're trying to be fiscally responsible.

But at the end of the day, you need to know that the decisions that you're making are impacting Albertans. They're actually number one. Those Albertans are going to have to pay more out of their own pocket. The municipalities themselves are going to have to charge more taxes, more property taxes so that they can at least provide the same level of service as before, or else those Albertans are going to have to go without those services. This government claims to be focused on the livelihoods of Albertans. Well, this is about the livelihoods of Albertans. If they're having to pay more out of their own pocket, then it's having a drastic economic impact on that family budget.

See, this is the thing, Mr. Speaker. I'll remind all Albertans that this government likes to equate the provincial budget with the family budget. Even this government is doing its own version of countercyclical spending by investing in infrastructure projects so that we can keep Albertans working. We also did that while we were in government because we wanted to keep Albertans working. The reality is that now, with the decisions that are being made with

this particular piece of legislation, it's having more of a drastic impact because they're actually cutting monies that the municipalities are going to be able to spend on what are actual services for the people of Alberta. This is why I am asking the government to please refer this to committee, so that you can have a better understanding of how you're impacting the actual lives of Albertans.

They're going to have to pay more out of their own pocket. How many more – and if Albertans are having to pay more out of their own pocket for services that they need, then are they going to be able to spend on other things? This draws into question: okay; how much money are people going to be able to spend in the actual local economy? All these things have to be considered, which is all the more reason why we should send this to committee, so that we can have people actually engage in the conversation about how this is going to impact Albertans and, collectively with all of the decisions that are being made by this government, how it's actually impacting.

Those same children that we actually pulled out of poverty because of the priorities that we set while we were in government in the budget that we put forward: how many of those children are actually going to go back into poverty because of the decisions that this government has been making with every piece of legislation after piece of legislation after piece of legislation that they've introduced in this House? This is what this debate is about. It's about priorities. It's about what is best for all Albertans, who we are here to serve.

But I get it. You know, the ideological approach of Conservatives is to separate government from the people, that somehow the big, bad government is not there to actually work for you; they're just a bunch of people that are living high on the hog and are just taking advantage of you, and they don't really have your best interests in mind. That's how they sow division. They sow division between Albertans. We've seen it many times before within other pieces of legislation, Mr. Speaker, where they try to put the people against the public service as if somehow the people who work in the public service are different than Albertans. That's the kind of philosophy underlying the ideological approach of the Conservatives that are on the other side of this House.

But I'm here to tell Albertans that we're all one. We're all Albertans, and when government is prioritizing programs that are actually pulling children out of poverty, what we're trying to do is help all Albertans. Trying to have an economy that raises everybody up, that supports everybody rather than just a few: this is the noble cause that we are here to attempt to do. So stop sowing division with this ideological approach that somehow government is different than the people. After all, isn't it the people who vote and elect us all into this place? I'll remind us all, then, that our responsibility is to serve those people. Now, I get it. We have a difference in ideology, but you can't keep sowing division. It leads down a path to greater difficulty for all Albertans, and we've seen it before in other places, where it's like history repeating itself all over again. When there are more economic difficulties, when there are fewer opportunities for Albertans, what ends up happening?

5:20

Now, I'm not saying that the members on the other side of the House are saying this, but what I'm saying is that when you sow division amongst people and there are fewer opportunities for the people of Alberta, they start pointing the fingers at people that look different than what they look like. This is where you have racism, discrimination, and you see the hatred that has been manifested on the streets of this city as well as Calgary with the attacks on black Muslim women.

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

The Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: I'm rising on 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I recognize that the member opposite from Edmonton-Ellerslie has sincere and great concerns about division and unity within this province, but what I'm getting from his remarks right now is that he's insinuating that the policies the government is putting forward are creating division and further perpetuating, by design, racism and discrimination within society. Mr. Speaker, that is a dangerous path for that member to go down. While I understand he may not intend that – at least I hope he doesn't intend that – that's the way I believe many Albertans may very well interpret those remarks.

It is not creating any unity in this Chamber, and I would encourage that member to retract those remarks or at least course correct with what he is saying because that is, without question, creating disorder both in this Chamber and outside of this Chamber, to suggest that this government is trying to put forth policies to sow division, racism, and discrimination within society.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order. The member is engaging in debate and has drawn, I think, some very reasonable factual components of the fact that we're continuing to see political division and adversarial relationships, how that contributes to how Albertans are thinking and feeling right now. As well, he touched in his remarks on issues around systemic racism, and he touched on, I think, very important and factual remarks, that we need to be considering how our behaviour in this Chamber and in politics can impact people outside of this Chamber.

I strongly believe this is not a point of order. Rather, we need to be able to have very difficult conversations in this Chamber about how our policies and how our words impact all Albertans because that impact is disproportionate. If we can't have a conversation about that, then we are in a very dangerous place. I would suggest that this is a matter of debate. I would suggest that the member be allowed to continue his comments, and I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? Keeping in mind that you should be providing new content to the points of order and not just . . . [interjections] Order. Order. Now, if the member has some new content, I'm happy to hear it, but prolonging debate on the same issue is not the purpose of a point of order.

Mr. Madu: I forgo, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No problem.

Here's what I would say. If the member is implying that any member of the government or any member of the Assembly is a racist or is intending for individuals outside this Chamber to commit acts of violence against a minority or otherwise, that would be wildly inappropriate and unparliamentary. I'm not convinced that's what the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie did do. Certainly, if he did, he should apologize and withdraw. If he didn't, he has 16 seconds remaining in his remarks.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By no means did I – I actually stated, and you can check the Blues or *Hansard* when it

actually comes out: I am not saying that the members on the other side are saying this. So please listen to what I'm saying, and don't put words in my mouth.

Debate Continued

Member Loyola: Lack of opportunity is what leads to these divisions in society. People start blaming other people when there is a lack of opportunity. Let's do better.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has more to say, and I wish to hear it.

The Speaker: I would just provide caution. I'm happy to hear from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie as that is his right inside the Chamber, but I do hope that he will be clear as he was in his concluding remarks about – order – what people may or may not be doing in or outside the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that these are really difficult conversations to have, but we need to understand that the decisions that we make in this House are going to have an impact. It may not be our intention – and this is actually something that's so important. I'm sure that people are very familiar with the saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I can't tell you how many times I've heard that growing up not only in English but also in Spanish because the same saying exists in Spanish as well.

I'm not suggesting that the members on the other side are somehow contributing to the problems in a direct way. What I am saying, though, is that when you make decisions sometimes, the desired outcome that you have is not what you end up with, and a lot of the times in life we go through making decisions by trial and error. I get it. But when you choose to give billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars to corporations when you've seen this economic approach fail time and again in other jurisdictions and you're hoping for a different outcome, well, this is what we're calling into question on this side of the House. I think it's important that we analyze carefully what the outcomes are of the decisions that we make inside of this House.

Now, specifically, this is what this conversation is all about at this time. It's about sending this particular piece of legislation to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, inviting people, specialists, people who have interest, people who will be directly impacted by the decisions that are being made under this piece of legislation and asking them for their insights and their feedback. What's wrong with that? I think that this would be a really good way for us to go to be able to understand completely what the impacts of this particular piece of legislation are going to be. At the end of the day, if the undesired outcome of making it more financially challenging for Albertans is what's going to happen with this piece of legislation, then I think that we need to take a really good, long second look at what it's going to do. This is what people on this side of the House, the members from this side of the House from our caucus, are trying to relate to the rest of the Legislature through our very fantastic Mr. Speaker.

I think that it's really important that we have this opportunity to investigate a little bit further because often, you know – it's always been interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, that for the majority of citizens the order of government that they have the most interaction with is the municipal one, yet it seems that this particular order of

government has fewer levers to actually be able to play with to make sure that Albertans are benefiting. We need to take a second look at that.

5:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment REF1, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the debate this afternoon and, hopefully, add something relevant to the topic of referring Bill 56 to the committee that I belong to and one that I think would very much welcome a bill of this nature coming before it, where we could certainly invite some guests to appear before us or present submissions to the committee to make their voices heard with respect to their constituents regarding the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.

I'm thinking, of course, of groups who would be most directly affected by the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, most affected by the loss of revenues anticipated under the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act and the implementation of the hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to municipalities. Of course, Mr. Speaker, I refer to the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association or perhaps the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, two that quickly come to mind. I'm sure that they would probably fill a few committee meetings with the comments that they would bring to bear on the issues of what they think about the legislation this government has brought forward in Bill 56.

It extends the municipal sustainability initiative to three years, but it delays the implementation of the replacement program, the local government fiscal framework, to the year '24-25, so it basically front-loads, and then it squeezes at the end. It legislates cuts to the MSI program in line with Budget 2021, and although the government is arguing that they are front-loading the cash to ease the burden, it of course squeezes them at the end of the program.

Then, in order to fund the updates of the system, the 911 system, that are federally mandated, the monthly cellphone bill is increased by 51 cents, going from 44 to 95 cents. That's a huge cost and is not something that I think Albertans invested their votes in in the last election, to get the UCP to charge them for calling 911.

Now, the referral to the Resource Stewardship Committee is something I welcome, and I know that in that committee I can only imagine how many questions would be asked of the provincial government policy embedded in Bill 56, which is reminding us so much of all the other policies where the provincial government is basically AWOL in terms of funding. This is a recurring theme in the legislation brought forward by the UCP to cut costs, to lower their budget, to reduce their budget, but what they're doing is using a bit of stealth to do it rather than doing it as openly as possible.

What they're doing is basically handing off the debt to others. They are, by giving the municipalities these reductions, telling them that they are having to suffer, that it's going to be their taxpayers that are going to have to suffer, but the provincial government's books will not reflect that suffering because it's the municipalities that will have to tell their residents that they will be having their roads paved less or their culverts not upgraded or their sewer systems pushed back to next year or the year after that for renewal. Once again the provincial government is skipping out on that responsibility and, in traditional UCP fashion, is blaming somebody else for the pain.

A prime example of this at the highest scale, Mr. Speaker, is how the provincial government, the UCP government under this Premier, has consistently not taken advantage of shared-funding programs such as a program, that is being held up right now by the UCP government, to build the largest infrastructure project in the

province, that of the green line in Calgary. That's a roughly \$5.5 billion project which the provincial government has agreed to commit \$1.53 billion to. The municipality, the city of Calgary: same thing. The federal government: same thing. Basically, it's a three-way split. Federal money is available, the municipality is ready to go, but the province, in the words of many, is dithering on this project.

This Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act is an example of the same type of lack of responsibility in terms of the provincial government pulling their own weight. In times of trouble economically, you know, you ask your government – your provincial government, your federal government – for assistance and for help. What this government is providing, Mr. Speaker, is a far cry from an extended hand, an extended helping hand. It's a hand that's been extended and wrapped around and stuck in the back pocket for the wallet of the municipalities, that this government is bound to serve. These municipalities have rightfully fought back and more than expressed their dismay. They're angry about how they've been treated.

I know there are other examples, that will be, I think, soon highlighted even more than they are right now, with respect to jobs and economic development in this province where municipalities, who are looking to collaborate to respond to the realities of today – after a pandemic that is still ravaging our province, we find that many people are working from home rather than commuting to downtown offices, and that includes from areas outside of Edmonton and Calgary. They are looking to either purchase homes or work from their homes that are in more rural areas. Of course, Mr. Speaker, not only people working in their homes but students who are now taking their classes remotely from their home computers are finding there's an extreme need for and a lack of broadband capacity that will allow them to study and work from home properly. This is something that just isn't something that they'd like to have; it's an urgent need that must be addressed. Yet we find once again this same pattern, which we find in the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, of the provincial government being AWOL.

With respect to rural municipalities, say, around Edmonton or Calgary, where we find that during this pandemic workers in their thousands are working from home and students are working at their studies from home as well, it's almost impossible for them to do so because they don't have the broadband capacity required by their studies or by their business. I mean, there are people around Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Mr. Speaker, who raise horses. You know, a quarter million dollars for a horse is not unheard of, yet they have to go and take their truck and go to the top of a hill near their farm or their ranch to actually get enough of a signal so that they can conduct their business over their computer. It's absolutely ridiculous.

Yet, as I'm told by councillors in rural communities outside of Edmonton, the provincial government is AWOL on the funding. The federal government has money available. Just like with the green line in Calgary, the feds are there. Money to provide and construct the green line is there. The same with broadband right across the country but also in Alberta. Municipalities have millions of dollars. They say: "Look, we've got the money. This is not something we would like to have; we need this. Going forward, we're going to need it even more."

5:40

Then the province is AWOL. They're nowhere near ready to jump into gear and accept the reality that things are changing, and what they're doing is simply trying to make their budget balance. I mean, it's something that is wrong-headed. Even in the midst of a

pandemic, Mr. Speaker, we have to be even more swift at adapting and innovating to the new realities that are happening, and this government is failing on every front, especially on the economic and jobs fronts, not taking advantage of the opportunities that are out there.

The broadband issue is one that is absolutely confounding. I mean, there's no better way, I think, that the provincial government could demonstrate its understanding of a path forward for this province than to build, in an economic downturn, absolutely necessary infrastructure, yet what they're doing is the opposite by way of Bill 56, the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act. The government would hear plainly from rural municipalities and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. If this bill was referred to committee, the government would hear plainly what the municipalities have been trying to get through to the government. They would have an opportunity to say: look, in one case there are millions of dollars ready to be devoted to building rural broadband. Federal government money is available, yet there are crickets from the province on it. They say, you know: you've got our ear, we hear you, we're really working hard on this, but we're not ready to do this.

The communities I speak about, Mr. Speaker, are just to the east of Edmonton, the Strathcona-Sherwood Park area. That county has money available for broadband projects. The federal government has got money available, yet the provincial government is absent. In my recent conversations with elected officials from that area I can tell you that it's very, very frustrating for them that the provincial government will not recognize the absolute opportunity that they face and that they sing their own song about jobs and economic growth and economic opportunity. It behooves me to give a platform to those municipalities in particular but also to the corporations and the large companies that would benefit from the infrastructure build that would result from a government that actually listened to what the municipalities are saying, saying that now is the time to invest, not to divest, because that's exactly what this government is doing.

They're not extending that hand up to the municipalities. They're not extending a helping hand. The hand that is being extended is being used to extract money from the municipalities. That's exactly the opposite of what is needed. You don't bleed these municipalities. That's where the jobs are being created, in these areas within our cities, large and small. This government is going to be left with municipalities that are stretched so thin that they are not able to pick themselves up properly once we do start to see ourselves through this recovery. There are multiyear projects that need to be addressed in taking care of some of our transportation bottlenecks, for example, around the Industrial Heartland, outside of Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan. There are major infrastructure projects that need to be addressed, and the provincial government is not one that's been willing to sit down and accept the responsibility to take on their share in partnerships with municipalities and the federal government on these major projects.

I think a referral of this bill, Bill 56, to the Resource Stewardship Committee would provide an excellent platform for those voices to be heard because, Mr. Speaker, so far they've been falling on deaf ears, and that is not the way this province should be operating. It doesn't matter whether it's municipalities. It doesn't matter whether it's the doctors and nurses and health professionals. It doesn't matter whether it's educators. It doesn't matter whether it's public servants of every stripe. It's that everything they do and say seems to be falling on deaf ears, and what the government is doing in return is simply nickel and diming, making, they think, I guess, their bottom line, their budget, look a little bit better. They're certainly alienating a lot of people, and they're damaging Alberta's

infrastructure, our human capital, our investment climate with these policies and with these decisions.

For example, I heard today that we are having public servants who would be cleaners and janitors in the buildings we work in – this building, the Federal Building, the Royal Alberta Museum – be privatized. So the public service will no longer be cleaning those buildings. Apparently, the government is looking to privatize that. Another slap in the face.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a). I see the Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Well, thank you very much. I was listening with great interest to my colleague's remarks, and I think you were going down, certainly, some interesting paths about the decision-making of the government and what you're seeing not only in Bill 56 but the need to refer it to committee. I certainly know from my time sitting with you in this Chamber through the previous Legislature that there were a number of times that the then opposition called for bills to be referred to committee, and there are a number of advantages to sending bills to committee in that way.

What I'm curious about, having listened to your remarks to referral 1 – and I'd love further thoughts from you as a colleague – is: what do you think are the most important one or two reasons to refer this to committee, just to sum up that recommendation for all members to consider? I certainly am supportive of REF1. I've heard from members of the government; they may not be. And what do you think would be the most important reasons to send this to committee?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the queries of my hon. friend, and I know that the member and former labour minister, Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, has at heart the best interests of the local municipalities that she refers to and the process, the legislative process, that we're all a part of here.

Now, when I first got to this place, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't really a big fan of referral to committees. I thought: well, there's nothing better than this committee we're here in right now in this Chamber, whether it's Committee of the Whole or speaking to bills and legislation at other stages of debate. But there have been some experiences in committee where I've found them to be quite useful. When they're used as a stage to bring qualified and well-intentioned Albertans with, I would say, objective views to come forward and bring to bear the information that they are living every day, either in their municipalities or in their business, in their families, in their particular organization, if you get that information laid bare at the committee level, where you're able to have a good dialogue back and forth with the committee presenters, and after you've received on many occasions some very, very well put together written materials and in some cases digital slide decks and so forth explaining in greater detail their positions and they make a final presentation, perhaps in person or now digitally to committee, my opinions of some of these committee presentations have changed.

I've learned to see them as a very useful means for legislators to gain a better appreciation and a much fuller understanding of the issues that affect the individual members appearing before the committee, and I think that in this particular case it really would lend itself well to looking at Bill 56 and allow a much greater public exposure to the bills and to the effects of the legislation that it would have upon businesses and members of the public in various municipalities throughout the province. This affects, Mr. Speaker, not only the fairly large cities that may be surrounding Edmonton and Calgary; it also is something that affects the small villages and

the counties as well and the outlying areas. The voices that we need to hear are those not often given much amplitude, and the committee, I think, would give them that platform so that we can actually hear them.

5:50

It wasn't too long ago on the steps of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, when we actually had hundreds of local elected officials coming out, talking about how the UCP government's taxation measures were going to basically knock the feet out from underneath the municipalities financially. They were driving hundreds of miles for hours, a four-, five-, six-hour drive, to get to the Legislature. These weren't, you know, mom-and-pop protesters; these were elected officials from counties and rural municipalities from across the province coming to protest a move made by this government which would decimate their finances. This continuation of this type of an attack on municipalities is something that I think they would love to tell the government that they are opposed to by coming to a committee meeting and raising their voice.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on REF1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been in this Chamber this afternoon listening with great interest to all members as they contributed to the debate, and I'm very pleased to rise to speak to REF1 on Bill 56. I note that the time is getting late, and my remarks will likely be cut off by the clock, so I'd like to just very quickly, first, put my vote of confidence into REF1 and the positive impact it could have on Bill 56 by sending this to committee for a number of reasons, which I hope I'll have the opportunity to talk to, each of them.

Starting off with some of the concerns that have been raised from stakeholders about the overall impact of Bill 56, of course, Bill 56 is implementing many parts of Budget 2020-21, and the resulting impact is costs being downloaded on to municipalities. Now, a number of my colleagues have talked about these things through the debate this afternoon. I think that it's really important that we consider the impact that Bill 56 has on already stretched municipalities, who are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, as is the provincial government, and who have had other fees and cuts that have impacted their ability to deliver services as well as provide the infrastructure that their citizens require.

Municipalities have a lot of responsibilities and a lot of pressures facing them, and through Bill 56 those pressures are increased. I would note just one specific item. There are, included in this bill, changes to 911 upgrades. The changes have been federally mandated, but this provincial government has made a choice to download those costs on to municipalities. Although the levy, which is going to add costs for Alberta citizens through their phone bills, is going to help off-set that to some degree, there's a big difference between the amount the levy is raising and the ongoing costs. Call centre operators, who are often municipalities, are going to have to shoulder those costs, and because Bill 56 adjusts who that levy is shared among, there are actually more operators, so some of the primary call centre operators may receive smaller portions of that levy funding. This is just one example of the pressures being downloaded on to municipalities on top of significant cuts to the MSI funding.

Although they've been front-loaded, it essentially is a 25 per cent cut over three years, but if we look and take a longer view, we really see that through the term of this government, MSI has been cut by 36 per cent. That's hundreds of millions of dollars that should be going to our communities. Certainly, that, on top of a number of

bad actors not paying municipal property taxes, has resulted in a serious crisis for some of our rural municipalities. I have to say that for some of those reasons the opportunity to send this bill to committee, to have MLAs, but more so than MLAs, experts come and present to us, I think, would be really, really helpful.

During the course of this debate there have been a variety of angles of argument being used, and I appreciate that from all colleagues. At one point through the debate information about the Conference Board of Canada and the forecasts into the future were raised. I did call this data from a third-party source, and I absolutely want to acknowledge that the Conference Board of Canada has said that Alberta will enjoy the largest increase in real GDP in 2021, but the context of this data is incredibly important. What the government fails to ever mention is that it's because Alberta had the largest drop in economic activity last year. We fell so far that it looks like, if you just quote the gain, we are winning, but we are not actually winning.

When you're talking about financial data like that, it's really important that we acknowledge that Alberta had a decline in economic growth last year that was the largest in the country. When we celebrate and share the single stat, that we will lead the country in GDP growth, it's because it dropped so much, but the government doesn't share that side of the story. I'm truly just reading a bullet off of the Conference Board of Canada's site. I acknowledge that third-party data is very important. How you interpret it and what you bring to the debate greatly changes the picture. If everyone is starting on the same step on a set of stairs, and somebody falls to the very bottom and they go up half, it could look like they've gone up a lot, but they're still starting behind, and that's a really big problem. So that was the Conference Board of Canada data.

I would note that around the same time frame the Bank of Montreal has said that Alberta is going to be sixth in the country

when it comes to job creation. That's a problem for the province that has such high unemployment right now. And I'm very focused on jobs here in the province right now, particularly because this government has been given hundreds of millions of dollars to use to create jobs and has not launched their program. We continue to wait. When the federal government gave the provincial government \$185 million, we don't see that being put to use.

A similar stat: RBC has said that Alberta is going to be dead last when it comes to restoring prepandemic economic activity. Again, we need to acknowledge that we have fallen the furthest. Because of that, it's actually going to set the stage for a challenge when it comes to recovery.

I certainly encourage all members to bring factual data into this Chamber. I appreciate it when I hear sources of information from different sides, but we also need to remember the full context of that, and we need to acknowledge that bringing in that type of data can be used in different ways and interpreted in different ways.

Knowing that my time is short, I will simply say that the changes to MSI and the delay in bringing in the local government fiscal framework, the reduction in funding that's going to municipalities, Bill 56, which increases 911 fees on top of energy prices and car insurance and school fees and camping fees, seems to be part, is part of a picture of this government making life more expensive for Albertans and downloading costs to municipalities. And I really want to echo a point that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora made . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, 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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