



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 13, 2021

Day 96

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 13, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

Municipal Funding and Bill 56

Member Ceci: Since forming government, the UCP has repeatedly downloaded costs and cuts onto municipalities and ultimately onto Albertans. The UCP seem to forget there's only one taxpayer, and any of these costs being downloaded will mean higher property taxes for Alberta residents or cuts to services for municipalities to fill the fiscal hole created. In some cases it even threatens the viability of smaller communities across the province. The UCP have already cut grants in place of taxes, downloaded rural policing costs, and made massive cuts to municipal sustainability initiative funding. In their last budget the UCP cut MSI funding by 25 per cent, on top of cuts announced in previous budgets. This funding is used to build roadways and bridges, water and waste-water systems, recreation and sports facilities, and public transit facilities like the green line in Calgary. At a time when Alberta is facing high unemployment and an economic crisis, this funding could be used to put Albertans back to work and build necessary infrastructure. Without it, municipalities will now have to decide which projects go ahead and which ones don't, leaving much-needed jobs on the table.

The UCP are implementing this budget cut in Bill 56, the Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, but rather than give this bill the debate it deserves, the UCP have used their majority to move to shut down debate on this bill. They know that this bill will only do one thing, make life harder for Albertans. As a result, they would rather run scared and hide. They're trying to hide from the town and city councils across this province, who will surely have questions about this bill at the upcoming AUMA convention this week. While the UCP try and run and hide, we will deliver a message to these municipalities and Albertans that we stand with Albertans in their corner. These cuts must be opposed so that we can create jobs for Albertans and build a better future for our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ramadan

Mr. Yaseen: Assalamu Alaikum and Ramadan Mubarak.

I'm honoured to rise today as a member of this House and as a member of the Islamic faith to recognize the holy month of Ramadan that began today, on April 13. Ramadan is a time of spiritual reflection and personal growth. As we fast from dawn to sunset during this holiest and most solemn month of the year, we deepen our faith and we seek spiritual renewal and reflect on ourselves, our values, and our actions. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam. It teaches us patience, generosity, discipline, and unity. Sharing, caring,

and giving are important features of the holy month. Ramadan reflects self-discipline, sacrifice, and, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, empathy for those who have less.

This year, like last, Muslims will be praying at home in household family settings because of pandemic laws and reduced capacity at places of worship. I know personally how difficult it is that you cannot come out to gather for nightly iftar dinners, gather for communal prayers in mosques, and organize charitable activities like the ones that usually take place, but I also know that safely celebrating Ramadan virtually or in spirit has meaningful purpose for those who observe. This year Muslims across the world will be praying and remembering the lives lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Muslims will keep doing what they have been doing before and during Ramadan, leading on the front line every single day. Alberta's Muslims are doctors, nurses, first responders, scientists, small-business owners, retail workers, and more.

Let this be a time for all Albertans, regardless of their cultural or religious backgrounds, to join those marking Ramadan by remembering the less fortunate and celebrating acts of kindness and charity. To everyone here in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world may I wish a blessed and peaceful Ramadan. Ramadan Kareem.

Vaisakhi and the Sikh Community

Mr. Toor: [Remarks in Punjabi]

Mr. Speaker, throughout Canada in each and every year the month of April is known as Sikh Heritage Month. During this month the festival of Vaisakhi is celebrated by the Sikh community all over the world in commemoration of the founding day of the Khalsa Panth. On this day Guru Gobind Singh Ji took the gift of Amrit from Panj Pyare and uttered the word "Gur Chela". The formation of the Khalsa Panth brought birth to unique principles and ideology in the religious and political arena. This ideology has that combination of devotion and power, which clock the deficiency of human freedom and judicial society.

By bestowing the gift of Amrit, Guru Sahib instilled in the helpless people the unique spirit of fighting against oppression, tyranny, and injustice by the government of the time with courage, fearlessness, patience, and contentment. It was a Sikh community that produced freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh, Kartar Singh Sarabha, and Udham Singh who liberated India from the shackles of slavery.

Mr. Speaker, Sikhs fought in WWI on behalf of all Canadians at a time when Indians didn't even have a right to vote. There are many Canadian Sikhs who served in the First World War for our freedom. John Baboo of Winnipeg was wounded at Vimy Ridge. Sunta Gougarsing, originally from Punjab, served in the Quebec regiment and was killed in action on October 19, 1915. Lashman Singh served with the 75th Battalion and was killed in action on October 24, 1918.

While Vaisakhi is a historic day for the Sikh community, it is also an important day in the Hindu and Islamic religions. Muslim friends today mark the beginning of Ramadan, and our Hindu friends celebrate Navratri.

Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on Vaisakhi to all the Sikhs across the globe.

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa. Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, my apologies. The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge did provide interpretations that are on the tablings table. I told him that I would mention it previously, and I had forgotten, so my apologies. There are translations. Should you wish one, feel free to grab one, or raise your hand, and the page will deliver one.

Support for Persons and Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, people are struggling through this pandemic. So many Albertans have stepped forward to help us through it, but these same Albertans need to be supported, too. The UCP says that they are thankful for health care workers, doctors, teachers, and everyone on the front lines for their work. But actions speak louder than words, and the UCP's actions tell a much different story. The UCP have made it clear that they plan to fire 11,000 health care heroes once the health crisis is over and chose to go to war with doctors when we needed them most. Throughout this pandemic it's been clear that we should do everything in our power to ensure that students and staff in our schools are safe, but at the onset of the pandemic the UCP chose to fire 20,000 educational support staff. After dragging their feet until the eleventh hour, the UCP finally introduced the critical worker benefit, but so many Albertans were deemed not critical enough to qualify.

Our NDP caucus has been calling for bold action throughout this crisis to ensure Albertans feel supported through these unprecedented times. We called out the government for failing to provide the critical worker benefit to all critical workers. We called on the government to increase supports for businesses forced to shut down during this third wave. We called upon the government to cap skyrocketing utility bills and insurance fees that Albertans have had to contend with as people stay home to stop the spread of COVID.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we don't have MLAs protesting the health guidelines or booking international flights to abandon the province because of, quote, family traditions. While the UCP is busy spending \$30 million a year to attack children's cartoons at the same time as failing to leverage hundreds of millions of dollars from the federal government, the NDP is standing with Albertans. This unprecedented health and economic crisis requires bold action, and the NDP will continue to call on this government to take the necessary steps to support the well-being of all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

1:40 Lethbridge Business and Industry

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lethbridge and area play an important role in Alberta as a gateway to the northwestern United States. As the largest municipality within driving distance of the U.S. border Lethbridge is a central hub for international imports and exports in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the strategic economic advantages of southern Alberta are vast. We are home to 70 per cent of Canada's irrigated farmland, 8,000 kilometres of canals and pipelines, and our government is going to increase that; \$815 million of capital investment will add another 200,000 acres of irrigated land, increasing the profitability for 4,470 farms and growing the \$8 billion annual activity.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that there are approximately a million head of cattle in southern Alberta and that we average 320 days of sunshine every year? Our commodities include not only potatoes, sugar beets, barley, canola, grain, hemp, beef, pork, and chicken but also value-added food products like french fries, potato chips, sugar, and pasta. On top of agrifood, Lethbridge's manufacturing plants have an international and global presence, with products from aircraft engines to cargo trailers.

To bring these products to national and international markets, Lethbridge is centrally located, linking highways 2, 3, 4, 5, with highway 3 receiving \$150 million of strategic investments for its

twinning. Additionally, we have critical access to shipping by train to our own rail yards and sidings. Our government also invested to improve the infrastructure of our airport's runways and terminal area, and we are close to the state-of-the-art Coutts-Sweetgrass border crossing.

With all of these great industries operating in and around Lethbridge, it more than deserves to be recognized as Canada's Western Gateway. With continued support from Alberta's government, things like preinspection for commercial shipping units could be established, which would expedite the process for crossing the border, increasing trade and efficiency. Lethbridge and the surrounding area have a huge global economic impact, with room to grow. Carefully planned strategic investments like the ones we've seen will continue to strengthen our economy in Lethbridge, Alberta, and Canada.

Legislative Assembly Staff and COVID-19

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the only reason this Legislature has been able to continue running during the COVID-19 pandemic is because of the hard work and diligence of so many staff. Cleaning, IT, pages, LASS, sergeants, facilities, and so on: these are the people that have continued to perform essential tasks in unprecedented circumstances. I want to take a moment to thank them. This building is both a symbol for the people of this province and a vital space for democracy to raise concerns, including how this pandemic is being managed. I want this building to stay open. I will keep showing up and fighting for Albertans.

I am deeply concerned about reports that at least four people who work in this building have COVID-19. There has been little or no public acknowledgement of these cases from the government. We found out about the first case when the media called us last Friday. This is not okay, Mr. Speaker. Staff working in this building, doing everything in their power to keep us safe, deserve full transparency. They deserve to know the risks, especially in a building with so many people coming and going. I am calling on the government to provide full disclosure of its COVID-19 cases and to provide information to the people working in this building about what's being done to address this situation.

We've seen this done very well before, when members from both Grande Prairie and Edmonton-Ellerslie were confirmed to have COVID-19. The Premier also disclosed when he was a close contact. I appreciated that. Let's carry these practices forward. This government already has been criticized for a lack of transparency. Failing to tell people in this building about the risks that they're exposed to highlights just how secretive this government has been.

To those people with COVID-19: I wish you a speedy recovery. I hope that you get back to work soon, regardless of which party you belong to.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has the call.

History

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the Assembly this afternoon. In the spirit of the beloved author Dr. Seuss, I humbly present the following poem for consideration.

One MLA
Two MLA
Orange MLA
Blue MLA.

What will history say?
Will they wipe us away?

We all know there's brains in our heads and feet in our shoes

We can steer ourselves any direction we choose.

But isn't it helpful
To learn from before
Rather than repeating
Those actions once more?

Do we want to choose not to know
From the goers before us and their places of go?
History teaches or begs a repeat
I want to hear from history as long as I sit in this seat.

Instead of erasing
Those who've gone before
I hope we'll consider
I hope we'll explore.

The world that they lived in
The things that they knew
What they did that was brilliant
What they learned not to do.

From world leaders like Churchill
From people of fame
From days that are over
Will we now hurt their name?

Do we understand?
Have we even tried?
Do we really know
What they faced in their time?

I hope those after me
Will choose to be kind
Will seek understanding
Instead of rewind.

So, Mr. Speaker,
To the world I implore:
Stop cancelling culture
And instead choose explore.

As we look up and down streets
Look 'em over with care
About some we may say:
We choose not to go there.

And we have that option to learn from the past
Instead of expecting those people to know
Of the places from this time
Places they couldn't go

Instead of requiring
Those who've gone before
To understand our time.
Need I say more?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a statement.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government recently released the new K through 6 draft curriculum, fulfilling a campaign promise. The draft curriculum was produced and vetted by the Curriculum Advisory Panel; 8,500 Albertans provided feedback through public consultations; 102 experienced elementary teachers provided feedback as well as the Association of Alberta Deans of Education and over 30 Faculty of Education professors.

As is always the case, Albertans have spoken up both in praise and criticism of the new program of studies. Many educators believe that the new curriculum's re-emphasis on traditional math logarithms and the de-emphasizing of discovery math is going to help Alberta students reverse the trend in declining international math scores.

Some teachers have reached out to me, worried about the amount or age appropriateness of the content of social studies. As I studied the K through 6 social studies curriculum, I saw many positives. I liked the way it is organized, with an organizing idea guiding questions and knowledge, understanding and skill objectives. It is clearly divided into traditional components of history, civics, geography, and economics, with a new component added in, financial literacy. I liked the chronological progression through the grades from First Nations, ancient and medieval societies, Canadian history, settling of Alberta, the northwest, and the great migration. I see the touchstones that will help our students understand the world that they live in today, from various faiths to First Nations, European, French-Canadian cultures, et cetera.

Yet there are still challenges. Expecting teachers to implement all of the disciplines of learning in one year is going to be very difficult. I would encourage educators to participate in validating the new program of studies. I would suggest that the Minister of Education engage the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia moving forward. Let's make sure that we develop age-appropriate resources and assessments.

If we do all of this, I believe we will have once again developed a world-class curriculum for our students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Restaurants and COVID-19

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every Albertan can agree that throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been uncertainty in the matter of what we can do with our family or friends, where and how we work, and how we can support our local businesses. There are many individuals and groups that we owe deep gratitude to for their efforts in recent months, particularly those providing essential services and on the front lines of health care.

But I'd also like to recognize one particular group today, that being those who work in and own our restaurants, bars, and cafés. These businesses have experienced direct uncertainty throughout the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically speaking, at the start of the pandemic they were required to shut down for dining. Then they were able to reopen for a handful of months, but now they are in an everlasting loop of restrictions. This is an incredibly difficult situation for any business to go through, but it never stopped these individuals from persevering throughout this mass uncertainty by adjusting their operations to meet our provincial guidelines so that they were able to stay open, keep their employees working, and pay their bills. Furthermore, these businesses never hesitated to continue to brighten people's day throughout their nonstop hard work. From what I have seen, they have never shied away from stepping up in every way possible for their community.

I want to remind Albertans that these businesses are staple members of the community. They are the stores that greet us with a smile every morning in our coffee shops or the ones who ensure amazing service and the best meals possible when we dine out. In my mission to continue to support our local businesses, I hope all Albertans will continue to make an extra effort to support these businesses through ordering takeout or dining on their patios throughout the last push of this pandemic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50 Oral Question Period

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

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we know that the latest restrictions, while necessary, come at a cost, especially to struggling businesses. Now, while I'm pleased the Premier took our advice and threw away his unenhanced benefit – his old grant simply wouldn't be enough. It limits support to business owners who have already received funding to just \$10,000. In Ontario it's \$40,000. The Premier claimed that he's offering the most, but that is false. It's a mile wide and an inch deep. Will he commit today to matching the \$40,000 offered in Ontario? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition is mistaken. The total amount being offered to Alberta's small and medium-sized businesses to cope with COVID is \$30,000. This is an additional \$10,000 tranche being offered today for businesses that have suffered a 30 per cent or more revenue decline since the pandemic began, and we're expanding it to include taxies and ride-sharing services and others. This makes Alberta the most generous province in Canada on a per capita basis with respect to direct cash support for affected small businesses.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Ontario offers \$40,000. In fact, this is the biggest wave of the waves, so giving just \$10,000 isn't going to be enough.

Now, our caucus has had multiple town halls with hundreds of small-business owners, and they've also asked for the following: direct utility relief, commercial rent support, expanded lines of credit, reduced insurance premiums, and a cap on fees charged by delivery apps, especially important for restaurant owners. Businesses need these supports. They've been asking for them for months. What are the delays?

Mr. Kenney: Well, there's no delay, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Alberta was, I believe, the first province to roll out direct cash support for small businesses affected by both the pandemic and the associated recession. We have provided already over \$600 million in direct cash support in addition to now the \$350 million in today's announcement. In addition, we paid for half of the WCB premiums – that's cost us over \$200 million over the course of the past year – in addition to tax and fee abatements and participating in cofunding the federal commercial rent assistance program.

Ms Notley: Hasn't addressed the list I just outlined.

But speaking of WCB, you only pay it if you've got employees. There are roughly 50,000 Albertans who just lost their jobs on Friday. In two weeks another 200,000 postsecondary students will finish their studies and struggle to find work while being ineligible for federal supports. Yesterday MNP reported that more than half of Canadians are within just \$200 of not being able to pay their bills. All this to say, Mr. Speaker, that working people need support, too. Last week we proposed another round of emergency payments for those Albertans. Will the Premier help them? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to people who may have lost jobs as a result of public health measures last week, let's put this in perspective. Had the NDP been in office during this

pandemic, none of them would have been working in the first place because they wanted to shut down the restaurants hard and most of our businesses from day one in a hard lockdown. It would have been catastrophic for those people.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to support, of course, the federal government has provided CERB and now the EI enhanced benefit, which is direct cash support. We, of course, have seen additional income assistance support through Alberta, and we'll continue to provide that.

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

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, this Premier cut postsecondary funding, and now we see just how much students will pay the price. Some programs at the University of Alberta are being recommended for a tuition increase of up to 104 per cent. These include business, pharmacy, law, and dentistry programs, and more. To the Premier. Postsecondary can serve as an economic engine for Alberta's future, but students must be able to afford their education in the first place. Will this government immediately reverse their cuts to postsecondary?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the government has not received a proposal in that respect from universities. Secondly, I would point out that our tuition rates are equivalent to those in British Columbia but below the national average. Particularly for professional degrees, tuition in Alberta is substantially below – but it's odd to hear a party of the left asking for working people to pay more in taxes as an upward transfer of wealth to people who will benefit from professional degrees all their lives.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because Andrew Batycki, a third-year engineering student at the U of A, joined me at a press conference earlier today, and he said that there would be no way that he would have been able to afford these tuition costs now being proposed for the program in which he is enrolled. He is among so many students calling for the Premier to step up and actually support postsecondary. To the Premier: how exactly does turning away future engineering students like Andrew help Alberta's economic future? The government has not created jobs that it's promised, and now it wants to . . .

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, under the NDP and previous governments we ended up with an unsustainable situation where the per-student costs for postsecondary education in Alberta were by far the highest in the country; in the cases of our two largest universities, about \$18,000 and \$16,000 per capita respectively versus half of that at some of the country's leading universities, for example, in Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia. We ask our universities to learn to operate as efficiently as those in other parts of the country, and that is a reasonable . . .

Mr. Eggen: Anita Cardinal-Stewart, a second-year law student at the University of Alberta and the president for the National Indigenous Law Students Association, said that her tuition in her program is due to increase by 45 per cent, to nearly \$17,000 per year. Anita is worried about indigenous students, who already face so many barriers with accessing postsecondary. Premier, such exorbitant tuition increases require specific approval from your Minister of Advanced Education. Will the Premier direct his minister to block these tuition increases, and then will the government step up and finally properly fund postsecondary?

Mr. Kenney: Once again, Mr. Speaker, we've not received a request. I would just point out to the members opposite that if we continue to operate massive deficits, it's precisely those students who will end up having to pay for that plus interest through their future taxes. The great advantage of this province, in part, has been its fiscal advantage, and I can't imagine why a student would leave Alberta to go and pay higher tuition in another province that receives substantially lower subsidies for their postsecondary institutions.

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

COVID-19 and Child Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, child care providers are doing everything in their power to keep their doors open and to keep children they care for safe during the third wave of COVID-19, which we know could be the worst yet. They need help from this government. Today I've issued a call for rapid testing for all child care programs, a new investment in PPE, an extension to the federal wage subsidy for child care workers, additional funding for parents who have to pull their kids from child care due to COVID, and a plan from this government for contingency funding to support centres forced to shut down. To the Premier: will the government introduce new supports to help child care operators get through the third wave? Yes or no?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I do want to thank all of the child care, out of school care, and preschool providers as well as day home operators right across the province for the outstanding job that they've done over the past year during unprecedented circumstances and times to make sure that both educators and children and their families remain safe and healthy. I also want to acknowledge the tireless work that they have done to adhere to the guidelines put forward by the chief medical officer of health.

Now, we did provide over \$110 million in funding over the last year, which was very much welcome. We will continue to listen to their needs and address PPE for the one centre who's . . .

Ms Pancholi: Well, they don't need thanks; they need help.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the new variant strains of COVID-19 have a more serious impact on children. We know that many parents are concerned about the safety of their children when they drop them off each and every day, and we know that child care operators are doing everything they can to care for these kids during the pandemic. We also know the government is finally, after months of stalling, bringing rapid tests forward to hundreds of Alberta schools. To the Premier: why isn't the rapid testing being offered at child care programs? Will you rectify this immediately?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was just saying at the end of my last response, we will continue to listen to the needs of child care operators right across the province. I do understand that one centre has asked for PPE through the ministry. We will step up to work with that one centre to get them the PPE they need.

When it comes to rapid testing, we do rely on the guidance of medical health experts and our chief medical officer of health. We do in fact know that child care centres and operators have done a great job of keeping kids and families safe, and we'll continue to take our guidance from the health experts.

2:00

Ms Pancholi: Well, I'm glad the minister is listening to one provider. She needs to listen to them all.

Mr. Speaker, the government provided \$3.2 million for PPE to child care programs last summer in advance of the second wave. There's just one problem: that money is gone. The Premier is warning we'll get 2,000 new cases of COVID per day, including hundreds of cases involving two contagious variants. If child care programs needed funding for PPE during the second wave – and they definitely did, to be clear – why hasn't an emergency fund for PPE been provided for the third wave? What exactly are the Premier and these ministers doing all day? It certainly isn't taking the necessary step to keep kids and staff in child care programs safe.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said a number of times in this House, we've continued to meet with and listen to child care operators, providers, and educators over the past year to get an understanding of their needs. We have been very flexible. We've worked with our working group to make sure that the dollars provided through both the federal and provincial governments were flexible enough to meet the needs of providers, whether it was supporting the wages of staff, the fees of parents, or PPE to keep kids and staff safe.

COVID-19 Cases among Premier's Staff

Mr. Dang: On Friday morning our caucus was informed by the media that there was a confirmed case of COVID-19 involving a staffperson in the Premier's office. We confirmed this with the government, but the Premier's office refused to confirm this to members of the media for over three days. Now, as we understand it, there are four confirmed cases. When was the Premier informed of the COVID cases in his own office, and what has been done to address this concerning situation? Why hasn't there been more transparency in these cases?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is, I think, a violation of privacy to release the names of individuals based on their health condition. I'm shocked that the NDP would ask for such information. I'm aware of two members of my staff who've tested positive and are in self-isolation, as are their close contacts. They're rigorously following all of the appropriate protocols per Alberta health guidelines. But beyond that, we're not going to violate people's privacy rights.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not asking for names. We're asking for transparency.

Many members of this Premier's political staff work in close proximity with MLAs, ministers, public servants, members of the media, and the people who keep this building safe and clean. Past precedent has led to immediate public notification of cases when they involve people in this Legislature. This was done when both the Member for Grande Prairie and the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie were confirmed to have COVID-19. To the Premier: why is there so much secrecy involving these cases? How many people are currently in isolation as a result of the infections or close contacts, and are any members of the government cabinet involved?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I would give a pro tip to the Member for Edmonton-South. If he's heard the answer to his question, perhaps he would want to modify the question. I answered that

question already. There are two members of my staff who have tested positive and are in isolation, as are all of their close contacts, all of whom went through testing and tested negative. Like any employer, like any workplace, people scrupulously follow, at least in this instance, the Alberta Health guidelines.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate because this Premier has already lost the trust of Albertans, he's lost the trust of his own party, and he's lost the trust of his caucus. This Premier is also at risk of losing the trust of the very people working to keep us safe in this Legislature. There has been no public notification of COVID-19 cases on these premises while staff are tasked with cleaning ministers' offices, staff offices, washrooms, and the very Chamber where we sit currently. To the Premier: shouldn't Legislature staff have the right to know where these confirmed cases of COVID are happening in the building?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, like any employer, like any individual who has come into close contact with COVID, they are notified. They're notified by contact tracers and, by courtesy, by the people who have tested positive. I don't understand what the member is suggesting. Is he suggesting, as his colleague from Edmonton-Glenora did, that we should violate individual Albertans' privacy rights and open them up – of course, what they really want is to send their online trolls out to attack these people for being sick. Shame on them.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:05.

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19 (continued)

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we asked small businesses to sacrifice for the greater good, and now we need to be there for them. Reduced traffic and public health restrictions have put these companies at risk. That is why I'm thankful for our government. They have provided supports in order to help ensure that these companies can keep their doors open. One of the ways that we have done so is through the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant. To the Minister of Finance: how many people have applied for this grant and for how much?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member, for the question. Our government has provided billions of dollars in direct support and deferrals to support small businesses through the pandemic. We've deferred and abated WCB premiums, deferred corporate income taxes, education property taxes, deferred utilities, and provided the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant. Through the first 10 months of the program we saw nearly 100,000 small businesses apply for funding, which will result in \$630 million of support.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that Alberta recently reintroduced public health measures and given that many small businesses such as fitness studios, restaurants, and more are currently being affected by those restrictions, support is critical to ensure that these hard-working entrepreneurs don't sink. Can the Minister of Finance tell

us what the government is doing now to support businesses affected by the latest round of public health restrictions?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member, for the question. Earlier today the Premier and the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation made an announcement presenting, basically offering a new program to Alberta small businesses that are being challenged because of the latest round of public health measures, providing up to \$10,000 of additional funding. That brings the total funding for small and medium-sized enterprises up to \$30,000 per business during the pandemic.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that's great news but also given that recently I heard from hotel operators as well as cab drivers in my constituency that they were not able to previously receive this grant and given that these businesses although not directly asked to close down – we know that they've been impacted by public health measures and the closure of Canada's borders to travellers. Can the minister confirm that these businesses will be eligible for this latest round of grants?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can confirm that hotels, taxi drivers, and ride-share drivers that were previously ineligible for funding will now be eligible under this round of the small and medium-sized business relaunch grant. We expect that approximately 50,000 businesses will be eligible for funding in this latest round of grants, and we encourage any businesses that are experiencing a direct impact from public health measures to apply for support once the program intake opens next week.

Summer Outdoor Events

Ms Goehring: As COVID cases skyrocketed across the province and variants became the dominant strain, the Premier promised Albertans that it would still be the, quote, best summer in Alberta history. Just yesterday he promised that festivals will be able to go ahead, including the Calgary Stampede. Moments later the Edmonton Folk Festival announced that this year's festival will be cancelled. Looks like summer is already off to a bad start. What is the government doing to support these summer events that create jobs and provide a big boost to local economies? I'm told that they're doing virtually nothing.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't think of a statement that better typifies the NDP than that kind of down-talking of Alberta, the effort to create more fear and hopelessness and despair, the pessimism. They are the party of pessimism. Alberta's government has taken extraordinary action to support not just businesses but nonprofit organizations. Throughout this crisis there was a dedicated team at Alberta public health working with major event organizers to do everything possible to ensure that they can stage, particularly, outdoor events on a limited basis this summer.

Ms Goehring: Given that the Edmonton Folk Festival isn't the only one that has been cancelled and given that the mayor of Calgary has said that the Calgary Stampede proceeding depends on the spread of the variant and if it goes ahead it will also be at a limited capacity and given that the Premier sat and did nothing as variant cases surged across Alberta and now we're on track for 2,000 new cases

a day, to the Premier: if the Stampede and Calgary Folk Festival are cancelled or run in limited capacity, will he admit that it's his fault for not acting sooner to slow the spread of COVID-19?

Mr. Kenney: We've shifted from classic NDP pessimism to classic NDP blame game. Mr. Speaker, when will they get it through their socialist heads that no one is to blame for COVID, and when they say that Alberta has done nothing, do you know that 4.4 million Albertans have made extraordinary sacrifices to try to control the spread? We have had since November a ban on indoor social gatherings. Grandparents have not been able to hug their grandchildren, and the NDP call that nothing? Shame on them.

2:10

Ms Goehring: Given that the Premier has proclaimed this summer to be the best in our history despite rising COVID case counts and a third wave that risks being even bigger than the second and given that this creates a lot of uncertainty for these events despite it taking months of planning to secure artists, vendors, and hire staff in order to pull off these events, will the Premier promise that if these events go ahead with planning only to have the rug pulled out from under them like the government did last summer in their failed Calgary relaunch, they will compensate these festivals and events for any costs incurred?

Mr. Kenney: Boy, Mr. Speaker, it must be pretty depressing to get up every morning with that kind of pessimism in your head. You know something? We are administering tens of thousands of vaccines every day. If we finally start getting adequate supplies from their friends in Ottawa, we'll have every adult Albertan who wants a vaccine inoculated by the end of June. That is a huge game changer. By the way, come to think of it, has any member of this place ever heard a New Democrat hold Ottawa accountable for choking us on vaccine supplies in the first three months of this year? I wonder why not.

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

COVID-19 Related Public Health Order Enforcement

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to start by thanking those businesses who have acted responsibly during this pandemic to save lives and stop the spread of COVID-19. I've heard their concerns about those restaurants and bars choosing to defy the public health order and remain open despite being ordered to close and the risk this poses to the health and well-being of Albertans throughout the community. To the minister: why has enforcement of establishments breaking the law been so slow in some cases? How is that fair?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, let me reiterate what both I and the Premier have said many times, which is that enforcement is not up to politicians. Enforcement is up to the executive officers in AHS, who enforce within environmental public health, enforce public health measures as well as the police agencies throughout the province. That's how we should have decisions being made about law enforcement and enforcing, including these public health measures. That's the right thing to be doing, and we will continue, though, to make sure throughout the pandemic that AHS has all the resources they need throughout the pandemic.

Mr. Sabir: Given that 17 members of the UCP caucus have openly stated that they don't support the public health orders and intend to fight them and given that their comments have emboldened some

restaurants, bars, churches, and so on to violate the public health orders and given the Premier talks tough some days about his crumbling caucus and other days he seems keen to give them a pass, when will the Premier confirm for the record of this House that if any member of his caucus is caught eating in a restaurant or bar in direct violation of public health orders, they will be immediately removed from the UCP caucus?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I made it clear that it would not be acceptable, I think, to any caucus to have people engaging in wilful civil disobedience, period.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Given that the Minister of Health brought in new provisions in the Alberta Health Act that allow AHS to recover the cost of enforcing public health orders from individuals and organizations and given that in our technical briefing with Health officials on this legislation, they explicitly stated that the intent was to recover the costs of enforcement – and the example given was GraceLife Church – can the Minister of Health provide a cost estimate for how much will be recovered from GraceLife Church to help pay the cost of month-long investigations and enforcement action taken in relation to public health order violations?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out the previous question we had from that caucus was the allegation that we had done nothing. We keep on hearing that from members opposite. They keep on making this allegation. They're trying to create this narrative that we've done nothing, and then thankfully we hear from this member of the NDP caucus admitting that we have done something. We've made through legislative changes, through policy changes – and making sure that AHS throughout this pandemic will have all the resources that they need to reply to the pandemic. It's the right thing to do. We are doing it. Thank you to the member for acknowledging this government has done something.

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

Rural Health Facility Upgrades and Renovations

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back in March Alberta's government announced a \$50 million commitment to modernize and improve rural health facilities across the province over three years. The revitalization of these health centres is a much-needed boost to health care in rural communities and will improve services for patients. Given that we announced over 15 revitalization projects as part of this commitment, to the Minister of Health: what was the process for deciding which rural health facilities would receive funding?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year AHS, in consultation with government, determines which programs and services should be revitalized and in which communities. AHS is responsible for the delivery of health services and is in the best position to determine the needs of their rural health facilities on a prioritized basis. The priority projects have been identified in all five health zones across the province. These projects ring in at about \$5 million or less and are expected to create about 280 construction jobs and stimulate the local economies. The funds are important to upkeep, quality of care, and the long-term sustainability of our health facilities.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that \$5 million has not been allocated at this time and is being held for future projects and given that health facilities, especially in rural communities, are always in need of improvements and maintenance to ensure quality patient care, to the same minister: will this money be used as a contingency, or can it be used for general improvements and facilities not included in the announcement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member noted, we are investing \$50 million over three years to upgrade rural health facilities through this fund. Currently \$45.5 million out of the \$50 million is allocated for critical projects like the \$3.5 million project for the emergency department renovation in the member's riding. Roughly \$4.5 million is earmarked for future projects or for unforeseen project cost overruns. We're committed to improving these facilities to improve rural health care and the care that rural Albertans rely on.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Minister. Given that we are revitalizing rural Alberta health facilities and given that an announcement like this supports Alberta's commitment to supporting rural health care and given that rural communities continue to struggle with high turnover rates and vacancies of medical professionals and given that capital projects like these are vital to modernizing the smaller rural facilities to ensure quality and timely delivery of health services, to the Minister of Health: do you believe that improving these facilities will help attract more medical professionals to stay in rural Alberta health facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that quality infrastructure is important to attract and retain medical professionals in our rural communities. We're also investing \$343 million for capital maintenance and renewal for health facilities. Last year we announced significant investments to recognize the unique challenges faced by rural communities, including creating one of the best incentive programs for rural physicians in Canada. We're spending about \$90 million as well this year to address rural physician recruitment and retention, including financial incentives, rural locum and on-call programs, the rural health professions action plan, and medical education programs as well.

Child Care in Northern Alberta

Mr. Rehn: Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago the *Lakeside Leader* reported that Legacy Childcare in Slave Lake has daycare spots available without a wait-list for the first time in nearly four years. Recognizing the importance of affordable and accessible child care to the ongoing economic recovery from COVID-19, how does the hon. Minister of Children's Services plan to ensure that child care centres like Legacy continue to have plentiful child care spaces going forward?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, we know that access to high-quality, affordable child care for Alberta parents who need it is important not only for working parents but for Alberta's economic recovery. Unfortunately, the NDP had a pilot that used politics instead of data to attribute spaces to different

communities, and they also picked winners and losers in terms of child care centres and parents. This created a lot of disruption. We continue to move forward. We continue to provide the highest wage subsidies and top-ups for child care operators and parents right across the country, outside of Quebec, and we'll continue to make sure parents . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Mr. Speaker, given that the COVID-19 pandemic will eventually come to a close and given that once this occurs, more workers will begin to return to their workplaces, it is reasonable to expect that the child care spaces available at daycares like Legacy will be filled. If so, what will the minister do to increase the number of child care spaces available in regions like Lesser Slave Lake?

2:20

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, what we've seen is that 96 per cent of child care centres across the province and preschools have opened, but they're only about 50 per cent full. Data from StatsCan suggests that this is related to some fear around the pandemic. We do see the light at the end of the tunnel. We're going to continue to support child care operators as we roll out vaccines and get our province back to some sort of normal. We also just closed an expression of interest to create spaces in areas of need right across the province, and I can check and work with the member opposite to see if there are in fact new spaces in their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that we know that child care spaces are needed in communities such as High Prairie and Wabasca, which presently lack the critical infrastructure and trained workers needed to have a licensed child care program and facility of their own despite demand for such services in the area, to the minister: what supports are being made available and plans formulated to improve access to this critical service for residents of High Prairie, Wabasca, and the adjacent areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, as I said, we are using data and not politics to create spaces in areas of need across this province. That also includes in licensed centres, facilities as well as day homes because we know that that is a fit for many communities. I'll check to see if any of these operators that the member opposite has mentioned in fact applied through the expression of interest. If they haven't, I would still be happy to hear from these communities at any time on how we can improve access to quality child care in these communities for these parents.

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

Chief Medical Officer of Health Briefings on COVID-19

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are well into the third wave of the pandemic, and the variants are taking over. Case counts are skyrocketing, hospitalizations are up, and younger Albertans are getting sick. In the Premier's words, it's a race between the vaccines and the variants, but right now we're losing. Albertans are rightfully concerned. They want information, but unlike virtually every other

province, daily health briefings by Dr. Hinshaw are nonexistent. A simple question to the Minister of Health. We're in an incredibly challenging spot, like we were in wave 2. What's happened to Dr. Hinshaw's daily briefings?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Hinshaw continues to make herself available to the media. She'll continue to do so on an ongoing basis.

I'm not going to take lectures, though, Mr. Speaker, from a caucus that has for years hidden allegations of sexual misconduct within members of their own caucus. I look forward to the member standing and telling us today that he is going to demand that the Leader of the Opposition tell the police about all that she knows about those allegations so that we can see the secrecy that happens within their own caucus.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:23.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the obvious desperation of the Minister of Health and that over the summer Dr. Hinshaw repeatedly told the Public Health Act committee that she gives advice but that he, the Premier, and the cabinet decide and given that it's not up to her decide on her briefing schedule – it is up to this desperate minister – and given that there are deputies who've led briefings when she's been absent before and they could do that again, and given that we're seeing many Albertans start to lose faith in this government and their public health efforts, including members of the government caucus, because of their shifting stories, to the minister: you have the authority; can you commit to daily briefings, Monday to Friday, from Dr. Hinshaw during the third wave?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the answer is no. All he had to do was say that yes, he could have called on the Leader of the Opposition to stop being so secretive, to start telling the police everything that she knows about these allegations, but instead he's deciding not to.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to be transparent, we will continue to make sure that Dr. Hinshaw is making herself available to the media, whether through the press conferences or otherwise, answering many of the media requests also that we get through e-mail and by telephone to make sure that Albertans – and, as well, through all the information that we disclose on the public website at alberta.ca.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, Mr. Speaker, given the shameless behaviour from the Minister of Health during the third wave of the pandemic, outbreaks of new variants, and a hundred cases in a single school and given that these variants spread significantly faster and easier, which means that providing up-to-date, localized information is more important than ever and only answering questions from media twice a week is entirely unacceptable and not what Albertans deserve, and given that Dr. Hinshaw is our best asset to dispel myths about COVID-19, including those coming from this minister's own caucus, to the minister: if you won't commit to daily briefings, what do you have to hide? Why should Albertans trust you, and why won't you be honest, forthright, and direct?

Mr. Shandro: We have been honest. We have been forthright. This idea that they would try to encourage the conspiracy theories that happen on the Internet about our numbers and about the data:

perhaps he's also going to devolve into an argument about cycles of PCR tests if he's going to go down that road as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Shandro: It's shameless behaviour, Mr. Speaker, that he would continue to go down this path of trying to undermine the confidence in our public health measures, the confidence of the people on the front lines trying to do their best to answer to this pandemic and make sure that all lives are being taken care of throughout the pandemic. Shameless behaviour again we see from the NDP.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:24.
The hon. Member for Highwood is next.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government had recently released our draft curriculum and has received some concerns from the public that our curriculum will hold our children back. Now, the members in opposition are not ones to shy away from twisting words in this curriculum to spread division within the public. I know our government is committed to improving the quality of education from K to 6 and would not create an environment that would hold our children back. Can the Minister of Education please address the public and this House on how our government is committed to creating an environment that will set up our children for academic success?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I know parents absolutely want the best education possible for their children. As the mother of two small children I do understand wanting to make sure that kids have the skills and knowledge that they need to be successful, and I know that this learning happens from a young age. The new curriculum is designed to move Alberta's education system forward. It will teach foundational knowledge – practical skills; critical thinking, including a strong focus on reading; math; and life skills like financial literacy – that will make sure that Alberta students have what they need to be successful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that our government is taking steps to innovate an outdated curriculum by taking modernized approaches to important subject areas in our current state and given that our students will now be exposed to practical life skills such as personal finance and coding and so much more, on which I've received high praise from both teachers and parents, can the minister explain how the exposure to new ways of teaching and the introduction of practical life skills will create grounds for our students to accelerate forward?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, if the challenges of the past year have taught us anything, it's that our ever-changing world is connected more than ever, and we want our children to have the skills and knowledge they need to navigate through it. We need to prepare students for real life and real-world problems. That's why learning practical skills like budgeting, public speaking, and digital skills is very important, and they're found in this curriculum. By teaching these concepts from a young

age, students will build their knowledge throughout the years that will follow.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Minister. Given that our government recognizes the importance of community involvement in the creation of these school curriculums and given that there is an opportunity right now for Albertans to voice their concerns directly to the government about specific subjects of the new curriculum and given that the government will consider all the curriculum feedback that comes forward, can the minister tell us how the community involvement that we have established in the creation of this curriculum will make Alberta's curriculum stronger than ever?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The draft K to 6 curriculum is currently in a year-long review and consultation process. Unlike the process of the NDP, this process is transparent. All Albertans, including parents, teachers, subject matter experts, will have a year to engage and provide feedback on this draft curriculum. We want to hear from everyone across the province as their feedback will be critical as we move forward with piloting and eventually implementing this curriculum. I encourage all Albertans to visit www.alberta.ca/curriculum and participate in the survey.

Fees for Recreation on Public Lands

Mr. Schmidt: Alberta families have been using this pandemic as an opportunity to explore Alberta's beautiful outdoors. Campsites are seeing record attendance. Rather than embracing and encouraging Albertans to use the natural landscapes of our province, the UCP now see this as the best time to gouge Albertans. Just yesterday the environment minister announced his plan to make it more expensive for families to visit public lands: \$20 for a three-day pass and \$30 for an annual pass. Can the minister explain why he thinks the third wave of a pandemic is the best time to pick the pockets of Albertans?

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

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 64, if passed, would provide funds that would go directly towards conserving and maintaining wilderness, the areas that we cherish across the province. Revenue would support public safety on these lands. It would allow for additional resources or boots on the ground to enforce rules to protect those lands. Albertans told us that they enjoy camping on Alberta's public lands and are willing to pay a nominal fee, and all of these funds will go towards maintaining and improving those lands.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Given that none of the things that the minister said were in the bill are actually in the legislation and given that during a pandemic, when Albertans are unable to visit friends or family, many are choosing to visit the outdoors and given that the environment minister now sees this as a cash cow as opposed to a chance to celebrate Alberta's beautiful and scenic environment, will the minister commit to delaying any new fees until the pandemic is finally over and done with, and if he can't, can he explain why he's in such a rush to take money from Alberta families just trying to enjoy the summer?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite referred to it as a cash cow. Nothing could be further from the truth. These funds are for improvement of lands. In fact, the RMA has supported the program. I'll give you a quote.

RMA applauds Alberta Environment and Parks for creating a fee program for backcountry random camping that will support responsible use of Alberta's public lands. The program provides for an important revenue stream that will be invested directly [towards] the safety, services, and protection of our public lands.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister keeps insisting that these guarantees on spending the revenue on the backcountry are in the legislation when they actually aren't and given that this minister was in such a rush to sell parks out from under the noses of Albertans and given that camping is the one activity that many families can do during the pandemic, can the minister explain the grudge that he has against campers? Why won't he just stop his camping tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's just a ridiculous statement. If passed, this legislation will enable government to collect a very nominal fee for recreation on public lands. In turn, this investment would go directly back towards improving the lands, making the experience better, and investing in the areas and environment that Albertans cherish.

Indigenous Content in Educational Curriculum

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, I think most people would agree that kids should learn about their country's history, but in the new proposed curriculum indigenous history and perspectives are not discussed until at least grade 3. The Canadian government stole children from their families and put them in residential schools at a very young age, but will children today learn about residential schools? Not until grade 5. If indigenous children were old enough to be ripped away from their families and put in residential schools, children can learn about that plight. Why are the Premier and the minister ignoring the calls of indigenous peoples? Are they trying to write them out of history?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit content, that is so important, as the member opposite just noted, will be taught in every single grade in the K to 6 curriculum. This was an important commitment that our government made to Albertans. For the first time the new curriculum will teach students about the history and legacy of residential schools and the signing of treaties. I encourage the members opposite to read the curriculum for themselves and see the extensive indigenous content contained in it.

Member Loyola: As we know, the truth is in the details, and that's what I was pointing out.

Given that the new curriculum will talk about the Ku Klux Klan, which includes teaching children their slogan, Mr. Speaker, and given that the new curriculum will have young kids honouring systems of war, not to mention teaching them about violent empires, to the minister: why won't the new curriculum teach kids about residential schools until grade 5? Please don't try to tell me that it's because it's too violent or disturbing, not when there's sympathetic language about the KKK in the new curriculum.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All students will learn about the history of racism and discrimination in North America and specifically right here in Alberta. Students will learn about the legacy of racism and antiblack racism. They will examine the impact of slavery, the fight for abolition, emancipation of enslaved people, and Canadian immigration policy on early modern Canada. They will learn about the KKK, racial segregation, and the legacy of Jim Crow laws. The injustices of our past must be taught and confronted in a real way in order for us to move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, sans preamble.

Member Loyola: Given that indigenous people across Alberta are calling for more of their history and perspectives to be taught in the new curriculum and given that the rich and diverse history of indigenous peoples is part of Alberta's history and that children should learn about it and given that indigenous children living in Alberta have to learn about settlers and the fur trade before learning about their own history and perspectives and given that this government has a duty to implement reconciliation with indigenous peoples, which involves teaching kids about the rich and diverse history of indigenous people, Minister, why is a Eurocentric view being prioritized over indigenous people? Put a stop to this now, and go back and actually consult with indigenous leaders.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, this is important content, and it is included in the curriculum. I do want to quote former grand chief Wilton Littlechild, who was a commissioner on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and believes that this curriculum is consistent with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Education, in general, is the key to reconciliation and with the work done to date; it is consistent with the United Nations Declaration in the promotion of respectful relationships between citizens, and as a Chief, I am honoured to be a validator to the new education curriculum and look forward to its transforming and positive change.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has a question.

Rural Development

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are hard-working people. In rural Alberta they work long days and nights in our agriculture industry to put food on the plates of people around the world. There are those who work in our oil and gas industry to keep Albertans' homes heated, powered, and to provide energy for many other countries. The hard work done in forestry and other industries is also helping the world. Rural-based businesses are at the forefront of developing new innovative and sustainable practices that have become the standard for industry and technology, environmental stewardship, and business as a whole. Will the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell us what the ministry is doing so that rural Alberta can attract much-needed new investment so they can continue to do their good work?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this important question. Rural Alberta is one of the most innovative and entrepreneurial areas not only in Canada but, in fact, in the world. Every day innovations and technologies are being created and put into practice across our province in every conceivable

situation: in our energy sector, in agriculture, in tech, film, and manufacturing. Our innovation employment grant helps support that research and development, and we've allocated \$166 million over three years to it in Budget 2021.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Minister. Given that there is recognition that rural Alberta should be promoted as an area for investors to bring in money and given that rural Alberta is at the forefront of being one of the world leaders in strategic innovation and that this innovation creates jobs and opportunity and given that this investment within rural Alberta will provide the province with significant economic development, helping build Alberta as a whole, can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell us how this investment is channelled where there is opportunity for investors?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our recovery plan details a series of sector strategies that will play a big role in attracting investment into rural Alberta. Our energy sector will bring oil and gas investment, renewable investment, mining, and clean tech investment. Our agriculture sector will bring value-added processing and manufacturing, new technology expansions through irrigation, and much more. Our manufacturing and logistics strategy will ensure that rural Alberta remains at the forefront of further expansions in capacity. We're ensuring that rural Alberta will come out of this economic hardship stronger than ever.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Minister. Given that rural Alberta is a large contributor to the province in revenue, jobs, and taxes and given that rural Alberta has the support of government in achieving innovative ways in production within each industry and given that this support will lead to furthering the landscape of business development in rural Alberta for the betterment of the whole province, can the minister tell us how the government will be attracting continuous investment into rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation in conjunction with Invest Alberta will be pitching the incredible value proposition that we've created in this province. That value proposition is already starting to draw attention from the investment community around the world. We're seeing investment decisions that mean real jobs, real capital, and wealth creation in this province. Rural Alberta will be a major part of that economic growth.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among all ridings in our province there is one shared concern, crime. Arguably, this concern is significantly greater in rural ridings such as my own. In the past rural crime plans implemented by the RCMP have made a real difference in some areas but not all. Some rural communities are still facing increased rates of crime, with some even near five-year highs. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: what are you doing to assure rural Albertans that their families and their property are safe?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we heard loud and clear from Albertans that rural crime is threatening the shared prosperity of Albertans

who live in rural communities. There are areas in northern Alberta where police response is measured in hours. In Calgary and Edmonton typically it's five to seven minutes. Just this month the RAPID response went live. This means that there are now hundreds more officers in rural areas standing by to assist RCMP in handling calls and bringing down response times. RAPID response increases boots on the ground in emergency situations.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In rural communities with smaller populations crimes are often committed by the same person or group of people. Given that many of these prior offenders are known to the broader community and law enforcement and given that these repeat offenders are aware and already know the justice systems in place in their communities, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that repeat offenders are dealt with consistently and effectively across the justice system, especially in rural and remote communities?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, repeat offenders are a scourge on our province. They steal and damage property, often victimizing the same families night after night. Alberta's government has implemented a number of measures, including the deployment of RAPID response to ensure more officers are available to respond to a wider range of calls, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act, which makes it difficult for criminals to sell stolen scrap metal, and the trespass statutes amendment act, which protects law-abiding property owners by bringing in tougher penalties.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some rural communities are facing increased rates of crime and given that in rural communities the judicial system faces capacity challenges, with rural Crown prosecutors and judges not having enough hours available for prosecution, once again to the minister: what have you done to address backlogs and capacity challenges within the judicial system, especially in rural and remote communities across this province?

Mr. Panda: Thank you, hon. member, for those important questions. Hiring new prosecutors and support staff will ensure that cases are heard more quickly and efficiently and that we focus those resources based on the seriousness of the case. I want Albertans to know that we are also investing in justice infrastructure, with 13 upgraded over the past several years. The Minister of Justice and I also broke ground on the new Red Deer justice centre last year and a new Court of Appeal for all of Alberta last year. We remain committed to continuing to work with the judiciary to address the growing demand on Criminal Code resources.

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

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Savage: I do have a notice of motion. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 75 in my name, which states:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Government Motion 71 is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to

any further consideration of the motion, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Bill 67

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 67, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act.

This bill will implement the findings of the Skills for Jobs Task Force to create a more modern and nimble apprenticeship system in the province. If I can take a quick moment to thank all members of the task force and members of my staff for their work in the development of this bill as well as my thanks to the Alberta Students' Executive Council for their support of this new legislation moving forward.

[Motion carried; Bill 67 read a first time]

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, supplemental response to a question raised by Ms Sweet, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, on March 9, 2021, Ministry of Health 2021-22 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:04 the Deputy Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 2:04 I did raise a point of order. The standing order that I will rely on is 23(h) and (i), "makes allegations against another Member," "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." In response to a question about transparency on those who are impacted within this building, in response to a question to the Premier about whether any minister is currently isolating, I think the Premier just referred to a statement that was made earlier by my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora, in which statement she essentially thanked everyone who works around here to keep this building safe, to keep this building and work environment clean. She thanked them and asked the government to be proactive in disclosing the risk they are facing. That question was exactly the same.

The Premier went on to say, referring specifically to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, that if that happens, she intends to send online trolls to go harass and attack those who tested positive. I think that's a very clear allegation. The Premier was in fact imputing false motives to a member's statement in response to a very reasonable question about the transparency of those who are impacted with COVID within this building. We were just asking for numbers; nobody was asking for names. It's clearly a violation of these rules.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we're having a matter of debate, and it's not a point of order. The point of order is

that we're actually talking here about a statement about sending in online trolls to attack people for being sick. There's no allegation made here to an individual MLA of any sort. The rise on the point of order was when we said that there would be a sending in of the online trolls to attack these people for being sick. I would just note that this is not a point of order and that there's no allegation to an individual MLA.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues. The Premier, in response to a question, said the following:

I don't understand what the member is suggesting. Is he suggesting, as his colleague from Edmonton-Glenora did, that we should violate individual Albertans' privacy rights and open them up – of course, what they really want is to send their online trolls out to attack these people for being sick. Shame on them.

A point of order was called.

2:50

I struggle to find a spot where the hon. the Premier made an allegation that an individual – he certainly referred to a group of people, perhaps suggesting that, you know, if anyone would want to encourage online trolls to attack, that is not an ideal path. In this case, I don't think that it was a point of order as he was merely suggesting that a group of people may do that. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

The second point of order was raised by the hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader at 2:22.

Point of Order Imputing Motives Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I'm rising under 23(h), (i), and (j), and that was in response to the question from the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre where, in response to a reasonable question on whether Dr. Deena Hinshaw will be available to share information about COVID on a daily basis, the Minister of Health resorted to, I think, accusations, where he said directly to the member that perhaps he will devolve into conspiracy theories about PCR cycles in COVID tests and conspiracies, that kind of thing. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but that was also directed at the member directly and not at the caucus as a group, so that clearly is a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't see a point of order here. I also don't have the benefit of the Blues, but what the hon. member from our side of the House was referring to was an article, a well-talked-about situation here in this Legislature. In fact, there was an article in the *Edmonton Journal* from November 13, 2018, the headline of which says: Two NDP MLAs Accused of Sexual Misconduct Kept Confidential to Protect Complainants. "The NDP hasn't released the names of two MLAs accused of . . . misconduct in order to [protect] the privacy of the complainants," said the Premier at the time. "We can't start parsing which details come out and [which details] don't come out," she told reporters. This seems to be a matter of debate until the Leader of the Opposition chooses to release the identity of those two MLAs who were part of her caucus in 2018 or are still part of her caucus today. This isn't a point of order.

The Speaker: It seems to me that we might be talking about two separate points of order. The hon. opposition deputy House leader raised and spoke specifically to the third point of order, which was around conspiracies. Now, albeit I did call the second point of order,

which you did address, so we may have some crossed hairs here. I'm not sure if the opposition would like to speak to the second point of order that he raised prior to me ruling.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was getting the second mixed up with the third, but that was my next point of order. I think it's an important one because the question asked of the Minister of Health was about a pressing issue wherein the chief medical officer plays an important role in providing information, timely information so that people can see what risk they are facing. Instead of answering that straightforward question, in order to deflect, I think, the Minister of Health responded by raising this issue from 2018, that at that point the then Premier had dealt with, and the identity was kept confidential on the request of complainants. They are only bringing this matter up to avoid answering questions and to create disorder. We have seen this behaviour from the government on multiple occasions, even as recently as March 23, when the Government House Leader raised these accusations and even named the constituencies of the members who were present here.

I think this is a pattern that this government is using to curtail debate here, to avoid answering the questions that are critical to us as a caucus, that are critical for Albertans to hear answers on from the government, and this behaviour, I guess, clearly is designed to create disorder in the House. I'm pretty sure that the Minister of Health and the House leader both know that if they even come close to saying anything like that outside of this Chamber, they will be sued, so they are using the privilege that they have in this House to say things where they clearly know or ought to know that if they were to say those things outside, they will be sued, that they will retract.

I think that it's a point of order. Mr. Speaker, this has come up before. I want you to rule this a point of order. Otherwise, I don't think that it's in the interests of this House that we go digging into what happened when the MLA for Sylvan Lake was convicted. We don't want to go over what happened on other occasions. So this is the point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you for your submission.

I provide the Deputy Government House Leader the opportunity to both respond to your comments and perhaps address the third point of order. You will have each had two opportunities to speak to both points of order, and then I will provide my ruling.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very quick. Look, the NDP asks a question, and they don't like the answer they get and call it a point of order. It's a simple matter. They don't like the answer they're getting. This is a matter of debate. It is not a point of order.

The Speaker: I think that in the interests of time I will deal with the third point of order first. I would agree with the Deputy Government House Leader that this is not a point of order and that it is a matter of debate. Ministers and members of this House have a wide range of opportunity to answer questions, and as far as I can tell – and I can provide the benefit of the Blues – the Minister of Health said:

This idea that they would try to encourage the conspiracy theories that happen on the Internet about our numbers and about the data: perhaps he's also going to devolve into an argument about cycles of PCR tests if he's going to go down that road.

A point of order was called. I fail to see any point of order. That is a matter of debate.

With respect to the second point of order, perhaps the more significant one, I will say from the outset that I'm not going to find this a point of order at this point in time. I have provided comment

about these sensitive issues on a number of occasions, and I recall that members of the opposition, when in government, made similar accusations about members of the opposition in previous times before entering the Assembly. As well, now we see members of the government highlighting things that are concerning to them that are also of a sensitive nature. All members of the Assembly have a responsibility. While we have absolute free speech in this place, that doesn't mean that free speech comes without responsibility, and I would encourage members to heed those words as they are discussing these sensitive topics. But at this point I will provide a caution, not a point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the call.

His Royal Highness, The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

72. Mr. Kenney moved that an humble address be presented to Her Majesty the Queen as follows:

To Her Majesty the Queen:

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, wish to express the deepest sympathies of this Assembly on the death of His Royal Highness, The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and the heartfelt thanks of this Assembly and the province of Alberta for his unflinching dedication to Canada and the Commonwealth, exemplified in his distinguished service in the Royal Navy in the Second World War, his commitment to young people in setting up the Duke of Edinburgh's award, his passionate commitment to the environment, and his unstinting support to Your Majesty throughout his life.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, as I rise to mourn the death of Prince Philip, I do so with his image gazing over us in this Assembly, as it did for the past six decades. That alone should cause us to reflect on the enduring connection that he has had to this institution and this province.

3:00

What does that portrait say to us? In it the vigorous young prince proudly wears his uniform as captain general of the Royal Marines together with the wings that he earned from the Royal Air Force as an experienced pilot and a chest full of medals earned through his distinguished service as an officer of the Royal Navy during the Second World War, including the Africa Star, the Atlantic Star, the Burma Star, the Italy Star, the war medal with oak leaf, and many others. Together, Madam Deputy Speaker, they are symbols of courage and patriotism in the defence of freedom and in the defeat of fascist tyranny, and that is no exaggeration. His Royal Highness was literally in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, when the Japanese empire signed the instruments of surrender, formally ending the Second World War. In this, Prince Philip was one of the last of the greatest generation.

His portrait gazes across our Chamber at his then young wife, Her Majesty the Queen, to whom he pledged on coronation day to be, quote, her liege man of life and limb as long as he should live, a different kind of duty, to be sure, but a pledge that he kept with fidelity over the next seven decades. In fact, on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary Her Majesty famously said, "[Prince

Philip] has, quite simply, been my strength and stay all these years, and I, and his whole family, and this and many other countries, owe him a debt greater than he would ever claim, or we shall ever know."

In these two portraits that hang above this Chamber, we see the embodiment of virtues that should never go out of fashion: life lived as a gift to others, love of country, the centrality of family, abiding respect for the wisdom of those who have gone before us and the institutions that they have bequeathed to us.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in all of that – in all of that – we can be forgiven for imagining that Prince Philip was simply born into great privilege and somehow glided through life, but in fact his childhood and youth were filled with great trauma and adversity. His family were forced into exile from their native Greece, after which he was effectively abandoned by his parents as a young boy. He was raised as a virtual orphan, and even the adults charged with caring for him died prematurely. His mother was consigned to an insane asylum until later becoming a Greek Orthodox nun. Incidentally, during the Second World War his mother, the Princess Alice, famously risked her life for hiding Jews from the Nazi occupiers in Greece, causing the state of Israel to grant her the title Righteous Amongst the Nations.

From this childhood of adversity Prince Philip developed a great inner strength that served him throughout his life. A talented, ambitious young man, His Royal Highness abandoned a promising naval career in order to serve the powerful woman he loved, literally to walk two steps behind her the rest of his life. On this point, during a visit to Australia he asked a politician at an event, "What is it that you do?" The politician replied, "Well, sir, I am the Deputy Premier." And His Royal Highness replied, "I know exactly how you feel."

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Duke of Edinburgh was the longest serving consort in the thousand-year history of our Crown. In his 75 years of royal service he participated in over 22,000 official engagements, delivering more than 5,500 speeches, and acted as the patron and president of more than 800 organizations. Dozens of those engagements took place on the nine royal visits that he made, with Her Majesty and alone, here in Alberta, amongst his 70 trips to Canada. The images of his visits with First Nations, at the Calgary Stampede, even an Edmonton Eskimos game and so much more reflect how he revelled in Alberta's frontier spirit. His passion for the potential of youth was reflected in the creation of the Duke of Edinburgh awards, in which I proudly participated as a youngster, like millions of Canadians, and his Christian conservatism inspired him to work tirelessly for the protection of endangered species around the world long before it was fashionable to do so.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is in his devotion to the Queen and our Royal Family that he will be most remembered, helping the sovereign to lead an ancient institution through the vicissitudes and dramatic changes of the last seven decades while being anchors of constancy and stability, while also embracing change, and doing all of this out of a deep sense of duty, of service, and of love.

Madam Deputy Speaker, his funeral this Saturday at Windsor Castle will include the stirring English hymn *I Vow to Thee, My Country*, which perfectly captures the spirit of the late Prince Philip and his century of service.

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar, the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I conclude with these words from Scripture. "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate?

Ms Goehring: As a member of the Commonwealth I want to acknowledge that on top of experiencing the incredible stress and trauma of COVID-19, we are now grieving a leader on the global stage who impacted many lives with support, laughter, and encouragement, and was a trailblazer in his own right. Today I offer my sincere condolences to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the Royal Family after the passing of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, who lived a long and fulfilling life, passing at 99 years of age.

As a father he raised a family with the intention for them to be pillars in the community, to learn to adapt in times of hardship, to be resilient in the face of adversity. His family has been able to weather many a storm as a result. Not only did he influence his family but also the rest of the world. Throughout his life the Duke of Edinburgh was greatly involved in the community, and he was an active member of 992 organizations over the course of his lifetime. His charitable endeavours were vast, ranging from the environment to technology to the youth of the world.

Personally I greatly respect all of the work that he did with young people, especially in Canada. He would visit cadet groups throughout the country and inspire them to reach outside of their comfort zone to take control of their lives and their future. With the complicated life we live today, these lessons are greatly important for our youth, and I thank Prince Philip for everything he did for them.

Along with supporting various causes throughout the Commonwealth, he also greatly supported his wife for over 60 years in a time when women were rarely seen in leadership roles such as this. He supported the Queen when she was at her happiest and in her darkest of moments. By doing so, he supported our Commonwealth. He was a role model for men for generations by demonstrating that it is possible to support a strong woman in a leadership role. In that contribution he has directly impacted my life.

Losing a loved one is never easy, be it your spouse, parent, or grandparent. I ask that Albertans join me in recognizing Prince Philip and his contributions and offering condolences to the Royal Family, who will no longer be able to sit together to read the newspaper or enjoy tea with their beloved husband, father, or grandfather.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

3:10

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to His Royal Highness Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh. He stood by the side of Her Majesty the Queen for more than 70 years, making him the longest serving royal consort in British history. Before his marriage to the queen and long-standing public service for the Commonwealth the Duke hailed originally from Greece, a country which I am also proud to have roots in. Born Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark on the island of Corfu in Greece, he had a tumultuous childhood, being forced into exile, and left, ultimately, Greece for France. While he abandoned his Greek and Danish titles, his Greek heritage stayed with the Duke throughout his entire life.

During his distinguished service in World War II he was involved in the Battle of Crete on board a British battleship and was mentioned for his acts during the Battle of Cape Matapan off the southwest coast of Greece. His service earned him the Greek War Cross. This is, of course, in addition to his service in the Indian and Pacific

oceans and in Tokyo Bay in Japan. His passing marks the loss of one of the few surviving heroes of World War II.

His mother also founded a Greek Orthodox nursing order of nuns known as the Christian Sisterhood of Martha and Mary. It is a source of great pride for me that the personal flag of Prince Philip includes the white cross from the Greek national flag, honouring his roots in the country. The cross represents the Greek Orthodoxy while the blue and white represent the sea and sky.

His Royal Highness was involved in hundreds of charitable organizations and initiatives throughout his life, inspiring people around the world. The Duke of Edinburgh's international award has changed the lives of more than 500,000 young Canadians since the 1960s, encouraging them to engage with their communities and improve their skills. This award is now a cornerstone of nonformal education and learning for young people in over 130 countries and territories, spreading the Duke of Edinburgh's legacy across the globe. With these great achievements and many more, I am proud to share a small piece of my heritage with him.

Alberta has been fortunate to host His Royal Highness on many occasions, notably in 1951, when he visited with Her Majesty, then Princess Elizabeth, on her inaugural visit, and most recently, of course, in 2005 with Her Majesty to mark Alberta's centennial year. On his visits to Alberta he met with the five chief signatories of Treaty 7, went to the Calgary Stampede, visited veterans and hospital patients and other experiences that showed him the heart and soul of our great province.

The Duke of Edinburgh leaves behind a profound and lasting legacy. He will be remembered as a decorated British naval officer, for his leadership in hundreds of charitable organizations, and for his steadfast support of Her Majesty the Queen. I join people across the world and in this very Legislature today in the sorrow of his passing and in continued admiration of the Duke of Edinburgh. My thoughts and support are with Her Majesty the Queen and the entire Royal Family at this time.

God save and long live our noble and gracious Queen.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate on Government Motion 72?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Madam Speaker, it is with great honour yet deep sadness to have the opportunity to speak on this motion to address the passing of Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh. Prince Philip was a remarkable person, with the highest sense of duty and honour towards his country, the Commonwealth, and humankind. His commitment to his wife, Her Majesty the Queen, as well as their children will also be remembered throughout history. Prince Philip was a remarkable man who lived a very fulfilling, service-filled life.

First was his military service. After graduating, Prince Philip attended Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, where he would excel and later be named the best cadet. During World War II Prince Philip joined the Royal Navy, serving as a midshipman on HMS *Ramillies*, and was posted to the Indian Ocean. He fought for a country that, at the time, he was not a citizen of. At the age of 21 Prince Philip was one of the youngest officers in the Royal Navy to be made first lieutenant and second in command of a ship, which was quite an achievement.

His second service in his life was to the British Royal Family and the Crown. His commitment to Queen Elizabeth was evident from the start as he abandoned his Greek and Danish royal titles, adopted the Anglican religion, and became a British subject so he could marry her. For more than six decades he remained the Queen's

consort and accompanied the Queen in all of her official duties and appearances throughout the world.

In addition to his royal duties he participated in the work of many organizations, particularly favouring those focused on the environment, athletics, and education. In 1956 Prince Philip launched the Duke of Edinburgh's award, with a focus on youth achievement. The Duke of Edinburgh international awards encouraged more than 500,000 young Canadians to engage with their communities and improve their skills since its launch. This award empowers young people to develop skills such as resilience, adaptability, creativity, problem solving, decision-making, and communication. Developing these skills supports the achievement of long-term positive life outcomes, including education attainment, employment, and well-being, along with mental health. The hope is that by helping young people achieve personal change in their lives, they can lead positional change in their environments, making the world a better place. The Duke of Edinburgh award embodied the spirit of Prince Philip and his values towards making the world a better place.

Prince Philip visited Alberta on a few occasions in his long life. He had the opportunity to visit Alberta both with the Queen on official tours and on his own. His first of three visits to Calgary started in October of 1951, when he and then Princess Elizabeth attended the special Stampede program of rodeo events and chuckwagon races.

It is with great privilege to say that the Queen and Prince Philip visited my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. It was in 1978. Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip rode by train from Vegreville to Fort Saskatchewan while on a tour leading up to the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton. They greeted Albertans along the way. Queen Elizabeth II was presented with a copy of Reverend Peter T. Ream's book *The Fort on the Saskatchewan* as well as a coin that was specially minted for the occasion by Sherritt Gordon Mines. Before leaving, the Queen unveiled a commemorative plaque and heard from Our Lady of Angels junior choir and the Fort Saskatchewan junior high school band.

Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip made a few more visits to Edmonton, Lethbridge, and other places in Alberta over the years, with his final visit being in 2005 to mark Alberta's centennial. During his time in Alberta Prince Philip toured sights, greeted crowds, met with students, artists, athletes, patients in hospitals, veterans, and First Nations.

Throughout his life Prince Philip was dedicated to public service. He was involved with hundreds of charitable organizations and inspired many to do the same. He was a well-rounded man, and his commitment to his family as well as developing himself was noted. In his spare time he enjoyed many hobbies, including polo. He competed in carriage and boat racing, piloted airplanes, collected art, and made oil paintings.

His sense of duty, service, and selflessness will be forever remembered. To commemorate his death, Alberta's government has created an online memorial where Albertans can leave comments and share their sympathies. We ask that Albertans please consider donating to a charity of your choice or to one of the Canadian organizations championed by His Highness such as the Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute, Outward Bound Canada, or the Duke of Edinburgh's international award Canada to commemorate him.

I'm saddened by the loss of this great man who dedicated his life to service in both his personal and professional life. May Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, rest in peace.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Hon. member, I assume you're rising to speak on Government Motion 72. The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise today to express my condolences to the Royal Family, the Queen, and to all those directly and indirectly affected by the passing of Prince Philip this past weekend. His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh passed away at the age of 99 alongside his family and those who loved him greatly.

Prince Philip was the longest serving consort in history. In fact, he was one of the last surviving heroes in the U.K. to have served in the Second World War at Cape Matapan and also the invasion of Sicily, where his quick thinking allowed his ship to be saved. Prince Philip used his bravery and his leadership abilities to steer the Royal Family and the monarchy in the right direction so that we could all live a life of freedom, happiness, and dignity.

3:20

He was able to do this for a number of reasons, but one of the most important was his unwavering support of the Queen, Queen Elizabeth II. Through thick and thin Prince Philip was always there, standing side by side with his wife, Queen of the U.K. and the many other Commonwealth states she resides over. Frankly, his commitment to the Queen was exemplified not because he was her main counsellor but because he was her husband, a bond that cannot be broken easily. For more than 70 years they shared a bond as husband and wife that was so precious and sacred that not even the most challenging of circumstances could break them apart. Till death do us part: that is the line many of us have said when marrying a wife or significant other, a line that Prince Philip and the Queen took to heart.

That is why it is so important for us to remember and reflect upon the significance of Prince Philip's death, not only because of what he meant to the U.K. and the Commonwealth but also in what he meant to his family as a husband, father, grandfather, and, more recently, a great-grandfather. I say that because for many of us in this House and for many Albertans family is so important to our lives. They're the ones we call for advice, for empathy, for support, and for even just a quick hello to start the day on the right note. Family is everything to many of us and to many Albertans, and that is why our thoughts must be with the Queen, the Royal Family, and all those affected. Losing your family member is always a very extraordinary, difficult moment in life.

However, as we reflect on the death of Prince Philip and the importance of family in our own lives, I want to highlight how Prince Philip gave back to his community and communities around the world. Prince Philip was involved with a number of charitable organizations that are recognized around the world. For Albertans and Canadians I think his development of the Duke of Edinburgh's international awards were particularly special to us. Since the 1960s these awards have inspired more than 500,000 young Canadians, with hundreds of thousands of Albertans included, to dream big and reach the highest of their aspirations. Whether it's a dream of playing in the NHL, winning the green jacket at the Masters, or finding the cure for a rare disease, Prince Philip wanted to inspire the next generation of leaders. Inspiring the next generation of leaders was not confined only to the U.K. but in all parts of the world. Luckily for Canadians and Albertans, the Duke of Edinburgh's international awards were one way of doing that.

Madam Speaker, given that today, Vaisakhi, is a very special day for Sikhs, I should also note the great knowledge Prince Philip had of the Sikh faith. According to Mr. Indarjit Singh, a prominent Sikh leader in the U.K., Prince Philip had a strong knowledge of Sikhism and contributed to the understanding and harmony among its varying

faiths. For constituents in Calgary-Falconridge it is comforting to know that Prince Philip had as much respect for the Sikh faith and many other faiths practised around the world.

As I conclude my remarks here today, let us remember Prince Philip for all the extraordinary achievements he had. Let us remember the Royal Family and the Queen, who have lost a loved one so deeply admired and respected by many. Let us remember an individual who contributed greatly to the kingdom, the Commonwealth, and the entire world. Something that we all have been told growing up is to always leave a place better than you found it. For Prince Philip he did that and more, something we all want to aspire to.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I think the hon. Member for Camrose is rising to speak on Government Motion 72.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. At the tender age of six years old I prepared a letter to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, wishing her a very merry Christmas. My mother mailed it off to London, England. To our delight Elizabeth's lady-in-waiting returned a letter to me, and I have been forever grateful to the Queen. I find it only fitting now, as a member of the Legislature, that I have an opportunity to express my sincerest condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and her family on the passing of her husband, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

Prince Philip was a long-serving consort in history. Throughout the Queen's 69 years on the throne Prince Philip carried out more than 22,000 solo engagements and delivered nearly 5,500 speeches. Born on the island of Corfu, Greece in 1921 to Greek and Danish royal families, Prince Philip lived a life dedicated to public service. After being educated in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, he joined the Royal Navy in 1939 at the young age of 18. Through the second war Prince Philip served with distinction in the Mediterranean and the Pacific.

On November 20, 1947, he and then Princess Elizabeth married. It was a marriage of love, one that was romantic until the very end. The couple were married in front of 2,000 guests in Westminster Abbey just two years after the end of World War II. In fact, then Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill called it "a flash of colour on the hard road we ... travel." Throughout their marriage Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth shared countless beautiful moments of love. One photo in particular that I would like to recall is one of the Queen struggling to contain her laughter as Prince Philip, dressed as a royal guard, surprised Her Majesty as she walked by. While it was all due to a swarm of bees, as reported in 2003, it is still a beautiful photo which shows the love that the two shared throughout their 73-year marriage.

Their entire life together was certainly a fairy tale, but also I want to draw attention to Prince Philip's Canadian connection. Here in Canada Prince Philip was given the honorary distinction of general of the Canadian Army in addition to his honorary role of admiral of the Royal Canadian Navy among others. In April of 2013 Philip made an unexpected solo visit to Toronto where he presented a new ceremonial flag to the Royal Canadian Regiment's 3rd Battalion. He had served as the regiment's colonel-in-chief since 1953, and during that brief visit he was also awarded the highest level of the Order of Canada by Governor General David Johnston. Prince Philip visited Canada more than 70 times, accompanying the Queen on several occasions and other times on his own. The Queen and Prince Philip's last trip to Canada together was in the summer of 2010.

Madam Speaker, Prince Philip's passing is a profound loss for all of us. Many throughout the Commonwealth, including us here in Alberta, will join Her Majesty in sadness. We send our deepest sympathies for her and her family. May his memory be eternal, and may he rest in peace.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an absolute pleasure and honour to stand and speak today. As my colleagues have said many times already, it was upsetting to hear the news Friday morning that His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh had passed away.

His Royal Highness was a man of true integrity and spirit. He believed in inspiring those around him, especially the next generation. The Duke of Edinburgh's commitment to young people began in 1956 with his establishment of the Duke of Edinburgh's award. The award came to Canada in 1963 and has since helped motivate generations of young Canadians to set goals and challenge themselves to take control of their lives and their futures.

3:30

The award itself is self-directed, with participants connecting with an award leader, usually a leader in their community organization, to establish a goal, document their progress, and achieve that goal. There are five categories: community service, skills, physical recreation, and two opportunities relating to journeys and adventures to promote independence and leadership. The combination of self-direction, accountability within an organization, and achievement on a public level has been a recipe for success for all participants over the last 60 years plus. Children and young adults have willingly participated in this award on their own merit in hopes of achieving their goals.

When the award first came to Canada, pilot projects were launched in various cities across nine provinces. These projects succeeded due in large part to the involvement of several youth-serving organizations such as the Air Cadet League of Canada and the YMCA as well as high schools and colleges. Promoted as an opportunity for boys and girls to distinguish themselves, the award became one of the most inclusive yet revered awards in Canada. The award created a culture where participants were only in competition with themselves while working to meet their goals.

A handful of ceremonies between May and November of 1964 honoured the very first award recipients in Canada, totalling 48 bronze and six silver award holders in Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick. Mr. Speaker, there was a sense of realism ingrained in this. It not only honours those who rise above the crowd; it also celebrates those who live life to its fullest and lead in more than just grades or athletics. It is one of the first awards to truly establish a sense of community and encourage others to be the best that they can be right where they are. By 1967 the award surged, with around 900 boys and 220 girls recognized as recipients. The award's value became even more noticeable in 1985, when participants soared to over 44,000 youth and participation expanded into all provinces and territories in Canada.

Fitting perfectly with the overall spirit, the awards grew over the years due in large part to teams of staff and volunteers across the country. By 1996 the Charter for Business, CFB, was established as a partnership between the award and the Canadian business community designed to support its expansion across the country. Since joining with the CFB, a greater emphasis was put on supporting all

children regardless of circumstances, ability, or geography. CFB funds are particularly focused on inner-city and at-risk youth.

Since taking root in Canada, over 500,000 young Canadians, as my colleagues have said, have benefited from the program. The impact of the award on young people has been nothing short of extraordinary. The award is now a cornerstone of informal educational learning, with more than a million young people involved in over 130 countries and territories around the world.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge a previous recipient of this award. As a matter of fact, I contacted my brother yesterday to see if he remembered going through the process, and he actually came up with his certificate of the bronze medal. We, my brothers and I, were all members of the 782 Air Cadet Squadron in Two Hills. I was a little bit young; I was 12 years old at the time. But he and some of his colleagues, at 16, took part in the bronze process and were successful. And if I recall correctly, Madam Speaker, their camp-out was in a snowbank, an overnight stay in a snowbank, to meet the qualifications. So it was quite interesting. Knowing my brother, you know, that he could dig this up 49 years later, he is probably attached to the first dollar that he ever made. Anyway, joking aside, this is a very serious matter. I just wanted to point out that even a kid in a small rural town in Alberta could take part in the Duke of Edinburgh award. It was quite significant.

This process is foundational to our society in building up the next generation of thinkers, innovators, leaders, and whatever else they want to be. Thank you to His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh for a lifetime of inspiration and belief in young people. My sincerest condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Family for the loss of a great man, husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other members that wish to join debate on Government Motion 72? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a sombre occasion to rise and speak to this humble address to Her Majesty the Queen as we mourn the passing of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh at the age of 99. As flags fly at half mast, portraits are shrouded, and we prepare to commend the spirit of His Royal Highness into the arms of the loving Father this Saturday, I join the Premier, all Albertans, Canadians, and citizens of the Commonwealth in sending our sincerest condolences to Her Majesty and the entire Royal Family.

The late Prince's life was one of service to Queen, country, and Commonwealth. He is an example to us all of what it means to sacrifice oneself for others. Prince Philip did this in many ways. He served in the Royal Navy with courage and pride during the Second World War, during which the United Kingdom, Canada, and our allies fought back against Nazi tyranny and oppression to restore liberty and justice to Europe and the world. Over the years he founded or gave patronage to 992 charities, which brought innumerable benefits and opportunities to young people, people in developing countries, and the most vulnerable among us.

Here in Canada he served as the colonel-in-chief of the Royal Canadian Regiment, the Seaforth Highlanders, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry as well as being hailed the general of the Canadian Army. He also held the honorary titles of admiral of the Royal Canadian Navy and the general of the Royal Canadian Air Force. In his over 70 visits to Canada the Duke

always made it a priority to visit his beloved regiments and units and offer his gratitude to our own Canadian servicemen and -women. In 2013, at the age of 93 and already in waning health, the Duke did not hesitate to travel to Canada one last time to present to the Royal Canadian Regiment their new regimental colours.

Believe it or not, I have a small personal story about the Duke's visit. Before I was alive, he visited Whitehorse, Yukon, in 1959. I don't know if this is true, but it was certainly one of my grandfather's favourite stories. Every time we would have pie at dinner, he would say: keep your fork, Duke; there's pie coming. That's a story. It's a Canadian story. I read last night on the Internet that it predates the Duke of Edinburgh, but it has been attributed for years and years, for decades, to his visit to Yukon, when he had pie at a restaurant.

Perhaps, though, his greatest patronage was the Duke of Edinburgh award, as many have commented on today, a visionary program which encourages and rewards the achievements of young people across the Commonwealth, particularly in the areas of volunteering, sports, leadership, and general advocacy for excelling, challenging, and pushing one's own limits. His passion for the ongoing education and development of young people and leaders is attested to by the fact that to date over 500,000 young Canadians have received the award, including my own son Alexander. My husband, Serge, and I had the great pleasure of working in collaboration with the Grande Prairie Boys Choir to help a number of boys in that organization work towards their award. Not only was the Duke committed to service and duty in his own life, but he celebrated the inculcation of the same sense of sacrifice and citizenship in young people both here in Canada and around the Commonwealth.

His Royal Highness was also an avid outdoorsman and conservationist. Nearly 60 years ago he established and served as president of the World Wildlife Fund for nature, which aims to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature. I would certainly say that he was a man ahead of his time. Here in Alberta we enjoy some of the most pristine parks and outdoor spaces, many of which Prince Philip enjoyed during his multiple visits to our beautiful province. We are proud of his patronage and passion for conservation.

We are all well aware of the Duke's long and illustrious public career. We would do well also to remember that the Duke was a doting and loving husband and father, grandfather, and even a great-grandfather. In over 70 years of marriage he stood unwaveringly by the side of his wife, the Queen, giving her constant support and unflinching love. In the words of Her Majesty, Prince Philip was her "strength and stay all these years." His commitment to family can serve as a powerful testament to families everywhere.

Prince Philip visited Alberta many times and, I think it is safe to say, felt very much at home here. The name "Philip" means lover of horses, and I think that rings true for the late Duke. Whether it was at Windsor Castle or the Calgary Stampede or the vast Albertan prairie, the Prince's love for horses was well known, and he always found a warm welcome here in our province. His charm and wit will be dearly missed.

The passing of Prince Philip truly marks the closing of an age. Most of us have never known a reign other than that of Her Majesty and her loyal consort, the Duke of Edinburgh. As we continue to mourn his passing, I pray that we will give thanks and gratitude for the life of Prince Philip, his dedication to service, and his example of duty. Allow me once more to express my deepest condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the rest of the Royal Family. May perpetual light shine upon him, and may he rest in peace.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate on Government Motion 72? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to begin today by offering my heartfelt and sincere condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the entire Royal Family on the tremendous loss of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. I was so saddened on Friday morning to hear the news. He was a mere two months away from celebrating the wondrous milestone of his 100th birthday, and he was the longest serving consort in British history.

He always portrayed himself with dignity and with the greatest respect for his role as representative of the Crown. Prince Philip dedicated his life in service of the people. This began when he joined the British Royal Navy in 1939, when he was 18, where he served with distinction during the Second World War, when he was primarily stationed in the Mediterranean and Pacific fleets.

In 1942 he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant aboard the HMS *Wallace*, where he became the youngest member to receive that rank, at the age of 21, a truly remarkable accomplishment. Late in the war he moved to the HMS *Whelp* in the south Pacific, where he served with the 27th Destroyer Flotilla. He was present when the Japanese surrender was signed, and he subsequently returned to the U.K. to become an instructor at the HMS *Royal Arthur*.

After his time in the military Prince Philip poured himself into a new way of serving the public, as the steadfast and reliable consort to Queen Elizabeth, but this was not all he contributed to the governance of his country. He truly believed in making the world a better place through his philanthropic work. The Duke of Edinburgh established and was a patron to several organizations focused on the environment, industry, sport, and education such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award, as many have spoken of today, Commonwealth studies conferences, the World Wildlife Fund, and nearly 800 other organizations, some of which he founded or was president of.

I personally have friends who participated in the Duke of Edinburgh's programs, and they believed it was life changing for them. This is one of the greatest legacies: his ability to inspire, encourage, and engage youth to serve and support their communities. One such example is actually one of our deputy ministers in our government. I recently listened to an interview where General Paul Wynnyk, now our Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, was not only inspired but I think almost personally convinced to serve in our nation's military because of the Duke.

As many Albertans know, he was no stranger to our province, having taken several trips to visit our beautiful Alberta. A familiar face to Calgarians, Prince Philip took several opportunities to attend the Calgary Stampede to enjoy the rodeo and chuckwagons at the grandstands, especially on his first visit, in 1951, with then Princess Elizabeth for a special program of our annual festivities, and he even signed the guest register when he stopped by city hall for a meeting with then Mayor Don Mackay.

In 1959 he came back to Calgary for the Stampede but this time taking in the festivities to meet with First Nations members. On another visit to Banff and Lake Louise in 1985, the same trip where he designated our beautiful national parks as UNESCO world heritage sites and presented new banners to the Royal Canadian Army Cadets, I had the pleasure to attend a dinner where he spoke with passion and an off-colour story, which I'm not going to – it may not be parliamentary to repeat it in the Chamber. He absolutely charmed everyone in attendance.

Once again the Duke of Edinburgh returned to Calgary, in 1992, to meet with Premier Ralph Klein, and his wit again charmed a group of protesters this time, outside of the Legislature, saying: "Ah, is that the chap I've been eating with? I've just been having lunch with him." He visited our province one last time to attend our centennial celebrations, in 2005, when he also visited Edmonton and Lethbridge with the Queen. Though he retired from public life in 2017, Prince Philip demonstrated the qualities of a distinguished statesman and provided many within the Commonwealth with hope and joy. He was beloved by many on all of the visits over the decades, and I can't imagine the void his passing has left in the Royal Family.

As the Queen's consort he provided Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth with a pillar of strength, comfort, and support, and the Commonwealth is incredibly fortunate and grateful to have had such a man by her side. He will be truly missed by his friends, family, and his loyal subjects throughout the Commonwealth. God save the Queen.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate on Government Motion 72?

Seeing none, would the hon. Premier like to close debate?

[Government Motion 72 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 64

Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021

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

Ms Schulz: Good afternoon. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Minister of Environment and Parks to move second reading of Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021.

Alberta's government is fully committed to common-sense conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation in Alberta. From day one we have been working closely with the Albertans who actually spend their time on the lands and listening to their feedback. Bill 64, Madam Speaker, is critical to continuing the important work being done to protect and invest in Alberta's wild spaces now and into the future.

This bill, Madam Speaker, responds directly to what we've heard from many Albertans in recent public consultation on sustainable outdoor recreation as part of our engagement on the Crown land vision. Albertans who spend time responsibly recreating on the landscape have told us loud and clear that sustainable funding is needed to conserve the landscape and promote enforcement. These resources are needed to make sure that Albertans can continue to enjoy random camping in our beautiful regions for generations to come.

Madam Speaker, we asked Albertans for their ideas to help shape the future of sustainable recreation on Crown land through a public survey in late 2020, with over 8,200 participants. Two-thirds of respondents were supportive or neutral on user fees as long as they go back into keeping these areas protected.

The reality is that increased use at popular random camping is putting additional strain on the landscape and those who maintain it. Many visitors make troubling reports about garbage and waste on the landscape, degrading trails and infrastructure, and a need for more search and rescue resources for when visitors need urgent

help. It is clear that sustainable funding is needed on the ground to maintain the landscapes and ensure that they can be enjoyed into the future. We want to ensure our government shares the cost of sustainable recreation that is fair for all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, Bill 64 will improve visitor experience, ensure public safety is maintained, and can serve and protect Alberta's beautiful and natural destinations. Amendments to the Public Lands Act will enable the Minister of Environment and Parks to collect fees for the use of, occupation of, and activities on public land. The amendments in Bill 64 will allow government to collect fees from recreational activities on these public lands. We'd make passes to pay for these fees easily available for purchase in the same locations where you would buy fishing and hunting licences.

If this bill is passed through the Legislature and receives royal assent, our intent is to implement a public land camping fee on June 1, 2021. Regulations to enable this pass, Madam Speaker, would be forthcoming. The planned public camping pass was a campaign commitment and was included in Budget 2021, and a proposal for user fees that will directly benefit conservation, enforcement, and waste management on the landscape is welcome news to many of the people who care about these landscapes and lands. Municipalities, user groups, and conservation organizations all agree that a low-cost pass for random camping is the right way forward.

Here's a quote from Brian Dingreville, president of the Alberta Fish and Game Association.

Outdoor enthusiasts from around the world cherish Alberta's wilderness. With increased pressure every year in our backyard from visitors, a Public Land Camping Pass means we can provide sustainable reinvestment on public lands for the boots on the ground needed to promote better conservation and waste management.

And from the mayor of Crowsnest Pass, Blair Painter, quote: "With the municipality of Crowsnest Pass being located in the heart of the eastern slopes, we are so very proud of the recreation opportunities available to our residents and visitors alike. We are in favour of legislation that would see implementing fees that would be redirected back into the land directly for the purpose of protecting and conserving the natural habitats, enforcement of rules for the benefit of all users, with the anticipated outcome resulting in overall visitor safety and enjoyment."

3:50

And from Lesley Peterson, biologist with Trout Unlimited Canada, and I quote: "The collection of user fees for random camping on public land is a good first step for the province in investing back into the protection and rehabilitation of areas that are overutilized. Recent increased interest in and use of our wild spaces makes this a timely investment."

Now, Madam Speaker, these are just a few of the many organizations and municipalities who have come out in support of this bill and the use of user fees to support sustainable recreation opportunities in Alberta, fees that will go directly to providing resources to support areas that are under intense pressure. As we all know, demand for recreation is steadily increasing and is anticipated to continue to grow. Increased recreation on public land has impacts on the environment, including increased garbage, damage to lands, and human waste. These impacts were most notable in the summer of 2020, where we saw an all-time high number of visitors to our public lands due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on people's ability to travel.

Ensuring sustainable opportunities for recreation and maintaining public safety does come at a cost. With increased pressure on the landscape and more Albertans discovering the recreation

opportunities available on our public lands, it is time to act. If this bill and associated regulations are passed, fees from the public land camping pass will go directly back into managing public lands. Fees would go directly to support improvements through infrastructure upgrades, education, enforcement, public safety, and environmental and waste management.

Madam Speaker, the pass would apply to Albertans 18 years and over when camping overnight on Crown land outside of provincial parks. There will also be exemptions for indigenous peoples. These changes will ensure that public land continues to provide sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities for all Albertans not only now but for years to come. This is also one of many legislative changes that demonstrate our government's commitment to create a fair and balanced system that protects the environment and supports visitor experience in our outdoor regions. Given the increased pressure on recreation, the need to collect these fees would be then invested, as I've said, directly back into infrastructure, public safety, and conservation.

I encourage and urge all members to support Bill 64. We must keep Alberta's lands safe and beautiful for generations to come, and Bill 64 is one important step. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members wishing to join debate on Bill 64? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I was listening contently to the minister speak about the government's rationale in relation to why these fees need to be increased. Oh, welcome to the chair, Mr. Speaker. I do have some questions as we move forward in relation to what the minister was saying. I think, you know, the whole rationale that we've heard is that these fees are supposed to go back to protecting the land, to providing services and infrastructure, and addressing the services that the government is saying need to be addressed. I guess my question around that would be: if that's the case, how do we know that's actually going to be happening?

The reason I say that is because there is no mechanism within this piece of legislation that actually requires the money that is being paid through these fees to be set aside in a reserve fund. It all goes to general revenue. If it's going into general revenue, then it gets put into the pot and dispersed at the guidance of the Finance minister. Because of that, to say: "Well, this money will go back into infrastructure. This money will go back into cleaning up areas and things like that" – why didn't the government dedicate a revenue fund? Why is there not an actual fund that is already established that all of these fees will go into?

Every time we do estimates, we're able to sit down in front of the minister and say to the minister: "How much did you get in fees this year? Okay; thank you. Where did those fees go? What did you pay? What infrastructure did you put in place? What parks were revitalized? How much did you spend on staffing? How much did you spend on having to have fish and wildlife officers go into those parks?" There is no mechanism within this piece of legislation that actually holds the government to account in regard to taking these funds in and then using them for what they're saying that this bill is entitled to do.

I struggle with that. I struggle with it because it just seems like it's another user fee that this government has come up with to put money back into general revenue to start trying to pay off the huge deficit that we already see is happening. Not only do we already see that Albertans are paying fees in parks – I mean, Albertans pay to

go fishing, they pay to have access, and they're charged those fees on public land already – now there's an additional fee being added on top of that to be able to, basically, make Albertans pay more with no accountability.

I struggle with this, and I really do think that – like, this is where my fundamental concern comes from, that there is no reserve fund. For example, if we think about what happened with the parks during the Calgary flood or even, actually, the Fort McMurray fire, many of those parks were destroyed when that happened, when there was a flood in Calgary, when the Fort McMurray fires happened. There was a significant amount of investment that needed to be made during that time to revitalize these recreational facilities. And fair enough; I mean, it's important that people around Calgary and people in the north have access to their provincial parks, but there was a substantial requirement to invest.

I could see that these fees would be used for that purpose, but what I could also see, with the way the legislation is written, is that the government could actually just say: "Well, actually, there's a clause in the bill that says that we can increase these fees at any given time. There's now been a natural disaster, we need to fix the parks, so we're actually going to increase the park fee to \$50 a month." There's nothing in the legislation that actually says that there is a cap. It can be done in regulation. So at any time if the government decides that they want to do an infrastructure project or they have a fire that goes through some of this public land, the government can arbitrarily decide to increase the fee with limited notice.

I mean, to think that the way that this bill is written as of right now is that it comes into effect, as the minister said, on June 1, which is a month from now, six weeks. So in six weeks if anybody wants to go and use the public land that exists in the province right now in the eastern slopes, they have to pay a fee. Many Albertans won't know that. I mean, I'd be curious to hear from the government as well as to how they're going to be communicating this out and if there's going to be a forgiveness period, let's say, for people who may on June 1 or June 2 – or whatever the date is on that weekend – go out and try to utilize that land, who may not have one of these park passes that they are required to have. What will the government response be to that? What will be the penalty to Albertans who are not aware that in six weeks they're now going to have to start paying fees on a park that they've been using probably for generations?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I mean, if I think about some of my family members that go camping outside Hinton, they use public land, and they always have. I'm not exactly sure where it is because I've never gone with them for other reasons, but they do it all the time, every year. If they were in the eastern slopes, I could see them continuing on, as their family tradition is, which is to take the camper out, and not being aware that they're supposed to have some pass on their vehicles to say that they've paid this fee. You know, I am concerned about that piece of it.

I'm also concerned that at a time where this is really one of the few opportunities that Albertans really have to get out and spend time with family, the government would be putting a tax on them to do that. Really, that's what's happening. Families who are stuck in their houses right now, who are dealing with two days ago we had snow, who want to go out and spend some time outdoors with their kids, running off some of the pent-up energy from the last six months of winter, now have to pay a fee to go and do that with their children, whether it be day use or overnight use. I guess the other question that I would have in regard to this is: okay, if an Albertan

has to pay the fee per adult – it's \$30, I believe, or whatever it is; \$20 – and they also want to go fishing that day, they have to buy a fishing pass, a licence, I'm assuming . . .

4:00

Mr. Bilous: Fishing licence.

Ms Sweet: Thank you. I don't know where my brain is today, but it'll catch up. A fishing licence.

So we have a day-use fee. We have a fishing licence fee. Well, if they're hunting, they'd have to make sure that they're paying those fees. What else could they possibly be having to pay on top of that? I mean, there are many questions around that, but when you start . . .

Mr. Carson: Insurance.

Ms Sweet: Insurance. Sure. Yeah.

But when you start adding up all of these fees for families that participate in this, it does appear that the whole premise of this is just to take money from Albertans to engage in their natural environment, with no accountability. This is where I get really stuck, because even when we do budgets and we look at estimates, we can see the amount of revenue that is generated from fishing licences. It's pretty transparent in there. You can ask the minister; they can tell you. You know what it's for. We know how much it costs to restock our local ponds and our lakes and to do those things.

But we don't know – there will be no transparency or ability for Albertans to see how much is being generated and then how much is being spent and that those numbers equal zero, because whatever comes in over the next four months or five months on the eastern slopes should be zeroed out by the time the next budget happens. It should be zeroed out in the eastern slopes area, and that money should not be used to do infrastructure projects or having to pay for fish and wildlife officers or the conservation and protection, as the minister spoke to, for any other region other than the eastern slopes. Why are people having to pay a fee to use the eastern slopes if that money is then being transferred to public lands around the Yellowhead area or in Wood Buffalo? There are lots of questions here around the accountability component.

I also am really concerned, as I've already said, that there's no protection in here, in this legislation, to prevent the government from arbitrarily changing the fee structure, and I think that that is a concern. I think we could see a \$30 fee on June 1. We could see a wildfire maybe happen, unfortunately, or, you know, a grass fire, as we've already seen in southern Alberta because it's quite dry, and we could see that fee substantially increase by the end of the summer to pay for something that may happen on public land. I don't think that that's fair to Albertans, especially at a time, right now, where we want to see Albertans outside in fresh air, not in close contact with other people, trying to be active and be healthy and spend time with family while enjoying the outdoors but not in large cohorts. This is that opportunity.

I think, you know, I would also like to see sort of what the definition is, why it is that the government continues to say that they don't need a legal mechanism that would guarantee that this money goes where it's supposed to. We've heard arguments – that the government would require a dedicated revenue fund goes beyond what they feel the intention of this money is for, yet we just clearly heard the minister, in the moving of second reading, say that this money is intended for those key areas, which are, of course, conservation and protection and infrastructure. Well, if that is the true intent, then a revenue fund does not go beyond the dedicated funds, and a legal structure should be in place to make sure that legally the money that the government is saying that Albertans must

pay and this is why – “This is why you’re paying your user fee” – is clear and transparent.

I mean, I’m sure many of us go camping. It’s one of my favourite things to do. If I go to a provincial park or a federal park and I want to have a fire, I pay my fire fee, my \$8 a night, so I can use my wood and, you know, have my little package. Away I go, and I know exactly what it’s for. That’s what I’m paying for. I’m paying to protect our forests, because I’m using wood that federally and provincially we know doesn’t have insects in it, doesn’t have pine beetle, all of the things, and that’s why you pay your fee. I get it.

What I don’t understand is why this fee doesn’t have that same clear and transparent piece to it, I guess. I mean, to say that it’s about – like, I don’t see any conversation from the government at this point to even give us estimates about what potentially the costs are going to be around conservation and protection or maintenance. Where did the number come from around the amount of money that needs to be received back from Albertans, from people over the age of 18? Why was it decided that it should be \$20 or \$30, and what is the anticipated cost that will then go forward into the general revenue?

You know, I think that at the same time something that the government hasn’t been looking at – and, really, we would encourage them to do that – is that there are other ways to encourage Albertans to be engaging in their community right now and to be healthy and actually stimulating the economy. We put a proposal forward that was about the Alberta travel pass, which was basically a \$1,000 refund that Albertans could apply for which would be 20 per cent of the travel expenses, with the intent of encouraging Albertans to get out into our parks, to get out into communities that we can travel to, and to spend time doing those things, hopefully when everybody is vaccinated, health restrictions allowing, of course.

But we are encouraging and stimulating the economy by Albertans spending money in Alberta, not to give to the government but, in fact, to support our small and medium businesses, that really need some good stimulus from Albertans. We need to see people going and spending money in their local communities and, hopefully, vaccinated and being able to start travelling again to Banff and Canmore and Jasper. To say, “Well, we want to put a fee on this,” which actually will discourage people from travelling and going to the eastern slopes at a time when, really, what we would like to see is Albertans, you know, spending time putting money back into the local economy, I think, is really counterintuitive.

There are lots of questions here, and I hope that at some point we’ll hear from the government side about how they plan on, you know, answering some of these questions. I really hope they’re going to fix the fact that there needs to be a legal structure in place around the general revenue piece, because I’m concerned about the amount of legislation that I’ve actually seen happening as of late that continuously goes back into general revenue, and we have seen many pieces of legislation over the last year and a half where it goes into general revenue. Well, the money is going to go into general revenue. A shell game, really, is what it is. We’re not seeing that money that Albertans are providing to government being used in the way that it’s intended because everything right now is being cycled through general revenue, and that’s not transparent. All that is is a shell game of trying to make the deficit appear less when, in fact, it’s not. It’s about really smart accounting that makes the numbers move from one location to another location when, in fact, it’s not paying things down.

I mean, I think we saw that even with AISH, for example, where, by changing a payment date, it looked like the deficit had been adjusted and there was more money in general revenue when, in fact, it was just because a payment date had changed. Yeah. Absolutely, there are really fancy ways that you can do accounting

if the government doesn’t want to be open and transparent about what they’re up to, which is why it’s so concerning that a fee that’s being developed by this government doesn’t have a mechanism to be open and transparent.

4:10

It’s a trend, I would say, that the more fees we see – I mean, we hear the government often say: oh, no, we haven’t increased taxes. Okay. Well, a different word for tax would be a fee. Yes, actually, quite a few fees have gone up. There have been quite a number of new fees introduced. You know, the government may say: well, we didn’t increase taxes. But if you take away the fact that interest is now being taken off personal income tax and the fact that we’re not able to – my brain is not working today – look at the fact that cost of living is going up and all of those things, well, people are paying more for their personal income tax, so technically there is more tax being paid.

And I’m sure that if I asked my other colleagues about examples of other fees – oh, toll bridges would be an example. Taking off the cap on insurance would be an example. There have been a lot of fees or, you know, costs that have been put on the backs of Albertans. If we look at even the debate we were having last night around MSI, which is about supporting municipalities financially, well, we know that that’s changing through legislation, which will then cost more – 911 fees on people’s cellphone bills. I mean, 50 cents a month: for some, that’s quite a bit. Oh, and camping fees. Technically, the park fees have actually gone up when you go to provincial parks, so not only are you paying a fee now to use public land, but if you want to go use a provincial park, that fee has gone up. I’m sure if I look back – and I’ll clarify this – it wouldn’t be surprising if licences have also gone up in the sense of a fishing licence. Probably it has a hidden fee in there somewhere.

There are lots of things where, if you really enjoy the outdoors, which I do – and I think many Albertans do because we live in a beautiful province – you see the changes that have happened under the government and the number of fees that continuously, slowly but surely, keep going up. Yeah. I’m disappointed that at a time where we could really be celebrating family and really encouraging people to access our beautiful province and, you know, get out of the house, because I’m sure – I mean, I’m feeling it. I can’t wait for spring to be here, where I can finally just get out of the house and take my dogs camping and, like, enjoy the beautiful weather and all of the things . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to join debate on Bill 64 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. It’s my pleasure to rise and speak to this bill, Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021. Now, I have a number of questions. I appreciate that this bill, I believe, was introduced just yesterday. We on the opposition side have a number of questions that we hope the government will answer on behalf of Albertans, but I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that at the outset my initial reading of this bill is that this government is once again costing and charging Albertans more, as was stated by my colleague, at a time when Albertans are desperate to get outdoors. They are desperate to vacation, to spend time out of their homes because of – obviously, we’re all well aware of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that people are looking for a break.

You know, my frustration with this type of bill is that at a time when we should be encouraging Albertans to, when safe, vacation in their own province, to spend time outdoors, the current government

of Alberta's response is: yeah; do that, but it's going to cost you more, and we're going to hit you with a series of increased fees. Now, I don't know how members opposite can justify user fees or think or argue that user fees are not a tax. "Oh, no; we're not increasing taxes; we're just going to raise the cost of everything under the sun, but we didn't increase taxes," which is actually untrue because the personal income tax has been increased on every Albertan through bracket creep.

Now, what's fascinating about that, Madam Speaker, is that the Premier himself, when he was head of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, argued against bracket creep and called it a tax. Somehow now he's completely done a one-eighty. Now that he is Premier of the province, it's not actually an increase in tax. Well, it is, and that's how Albertans see it.

In addition to increasing the personal income tax on every Albertan, this current government has increased costs and fees on a whole host of things, from insurance to park fees to registry services. For me, Madam Speaker, it's frustrating because you can't claim that you are antitax and that we want to reduce people's tax, and then at every turn you are nickel and diming Albertans.

Now, let's take a look at this bill, Bill 64, which provides the minister with the ability to charge any kind of fees that he wishes on public lands. This technically would enable day-use fees for OHV drivers. I can't wait to see how they're going to respond to the minister. You know, the minister has claimed for years in this Chamber about how the NDP did this and the NDP did that. Well, these fees go into effect in six weeks' time. How many Albertans did the government consult with on these proposed fees? I don't think a single one. And if the government did, I'd encourage them to table that consultation. The fact of the matter is that for a government that claims one thing, they have time and time again done the complete opposite. Complete opposite.

Now, I don't disagree, Madam Speaker, that there is a cost to the land when people are irresponsibly camping, leaving their garbage behind, et cetera. I don't think that their current idea is the solution for it. In fact, I can tell you that when we were government, we created more parks so that there would be more lands that Albertans could access because we know that people love to camp. I mean, we have and live in the most beautiful province in this country and, I would argue, one of the most beautiful places on the planet, so we should be encouraging Albertans and others to come and vacation here and spend their time in the outdoors.

What's interesting, Madam Speaker, is that when we look at this bill compared to what the Official Opposition NDP caucus proposed just a couple of weeks ago, an Alberta travel pass that would immediately incentivize Alberta families, when safe to do so, a very important caveat, to take their vacations here in Alberta, the beauty about this travel pass is that for Albertans and families that maybe only have, you know, a weekend here or there to get away, it still applies. It's a 20 per cent reimbursement of their expenses up to a thousand dollars for the year. This has worked in other jurisdictions. In fact, the province of New Brunswick has rolled it out, and the province of Ontario is in the process of rolling this out. They understand that international travel will be slow to return, but when it's safe to do so, Albertans will be vacationing within our own country. Why aren't we encouraging Albertans to do that right here in their own backyard, to explore parts of this province?

Madam Speaker, although I do love dearly Banff and Jasper, the province has so many other gems to offer which are not highlighted nearly as often as they should be. We have an incredible geography here in the province, but we also have incredibly diverse cultures that are represented here that Albertans should take the time to explore, many incredible towns and villages with rich histories that

members of this Chamber represent, but how many Albertans spend time in their own backyard? Not nearly enough.

4:20

We know, Madam Speaker, that the fact of the matter is that many Albertans take their vacation over the summer in British Columbia. I mean, if you want to see more Alberta plates than B.C. plates, just visit Kelowna sometime in the summer. The amount of money that is generated through travel and tourism is significant. In fact, Albertans spend over \$7 billion per year travelling outside of our province. If we could recapture some of that, it would be a huge, huge boon to our local economies, our local communities, our hoteliers, our restaurants, our communities.

But instead of looking at an innovative solution to incentivize Albertans and their families to stay in the province and spend their money here, supporting local Albertans – in fact, I don't know what's more Albertan than supporting our local businesses and our local communities. Through this bill the government is proposing to slap a whole bunch of fees onto Albertans who may want to or were thinking about staying here in Alberta. This bill is a disincentive to Albertans to stay here.

One of the other major concerns that I have with this bill as it's currently written, Madam Speaker, which was articulated by the Member for Edmonton-Manning, is that nowhere in the bill is it codified or written that any of the revenues collected from these fees will in fact be reinvested back into our public lands. Now, the government says: oh, no, just trust – trust us – that we'll do that. The reality is that we don't trust the government. They have had numerous examples and instances where they've said one thing and done the other.

My other question. I would ask the government, I'm calling on the government, to propose an amendment that ensures in legislation, not in regulation, that any fees collected from this bill will in fact go back and be reinvested into public lands and not flow into general revenue to be spent on projects like the war room, which is an embarrassment to our province.

Now, another question I have, Madam Speaker, is that now that there are going to be fees and a public land camping pass, how is that going to be enforced? If Albertans are camping without paying their fees, are they going to be faced with fines? How is the government planning to communicate this when it takes effect in six weeks? Now, you know, quite frankly, on the whole enforcement issue, I also have zero confidence in this government. If you want an example, just look at our public health measures and the number of examples where people or organizations have openly – openly – repeatedly defied public health orders, and there have been no consequences for them. I mean, that's the example that we have facing our province right now, today.

But before we even get to that, Madam Speaker, again, there are better, more creative ways to encourage Albertans to respectfully enjoy our province and all that it has to offer without having to slap them with additional fees. You know, what's alarming is that the Minister of Environment and Parks, on the potential additional fees for this year, 2021, during estimates – I encourage members to look at *Hansard*. The minister said, "Depending on user access and what the numbers are, the Alberta government will continue to look at user fees, including new user fees that I haven't identified today, to be able to make sure that our parks system can operate fully." Well, with a budget of over \$55 billion this is about priorities, and once again this current government is choosing to nickel and dime Albertans, bringing in fees in the dead of night, six weeks before they'll be implemented. The government has not consulted with Albertans, has not talked to them, and now we're going to get Albertans all over the province in a state of shock that they suddenly

have park user fees that they have to pay in addition to all of their other expenses.

You know, for these reasons I am opposed to this bill in second reading. I'd like to know and hear from the minister on why the government specifically chose not to allocate or dedicate a fund from these fees to ensure that it goes back and is reinvested into our public lands. Are there any limitations in this legislation on the fees that the minister could dream up or come up with and hit Albertans with overnight? Has the government done any kind of socioeconomic impact study?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand in the House today and speak on behalf of Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021. I'd like to thank the Minister of Environment and Parks along with the others who worked so hard to bring this bill forth. We as Albertans are incredibly lucky to have some of the best outdoor areas not only throughout Canada but the entire world. As the weather continues to warm up, and it will, many will soon be heading out to enjoy the wilderness and camp with their families and friends. I know that's something that I enjoyed as a child.

With my family we always went to Crown lands. It was great fun, it was great family time, and it taught me to both enjoy the wilderness and to respect it. It wasn't easy camping sometimes. I remember several times, like one night it took us quite a long time to get to where we were going, up by Benjamin Creek, because my dad managed to get the Jeep stuck and lose the hook for the winch in the bottom of a mud puddle. So that took a while to get out. We finally got to the campsite. My sister and I were, like, you know, eight and 10 years old, maybe. We were pitching the tent, and my dad was like: "Well, you guys pitch the tent. I'm going to go make dinner. Just watch out for the bats." Of course, we were: *waah!* Not your sort of typical camping. And then we'd go fishing. My dad – I don't know – had the patience of God. He'd spend more time pulling our fishing line out of the bottom of the trees than we actually spent time fishing. But it was all good fun, and it was great. It's one of those experiences that I think is truly, truly Albertan, and we're very fortunate to have it.

I'm really grateful for this bill because I think this bill will actually enable our Crown lands to be taken care of properly as well as to really, in one way, provide a bit of value to Albertans, to understand that, you know, we have this precious resource; we need to take care of it.

I think that Albertans expect to pay some modicum of a fee for their recreation. Whether it be on a golf course or on a ski hill or wherever it may be, we expect and value things when we actually take care of it and help to pay for the care of that.

4:30

I am actually very proud of this bill. Bill 64 is going to enable us to collect fees for recreation on public land, and it's going to begin on June 1 if we pass this. It's going to go directly towards conserving and maintaining the wild and beautiful destinations our great province has to offer. The revenue will be beneficial to all as it will support public safety on public lands, including additional resources to enforce rules on Crown land. I'll tell you, those rules – the member across was mentioning: well, how will people possibly understand the rules? I actually give Albertans a lot of credit. Most people that leave their garbage and litter behind know that they're breaking the rules, so if we have to go in and clean it up for others

to enjoy, then I don't think we need to publicize: don't throw garbage in the woods. I think people can understand that. The rules will of course be posted, but I think the very simple rules most Albertans will completely understand.

We need to let it be known that as much as Albertans love camping on public lands, we also need to maintain Crown land, and this bill will help ensure that that happens. Introducing the fee for random camping was an election platform commitment – so it shouldn't be coming as a surprise to anyone – and part of our common-sense conservation plan for environmental stewardship. Again, it's not something that we just started talking about yesterday afternoon. This was a campaign platform promise.

The public land camping pass would apply and be required for any individuals aged 18 and older when camping on public land in the eastern slopes of Alberta, which, of course, is the area east of the Rocky Mountains, south of Grande Prairie to the Waterton national park. This pass would be required at all times where random camping is allowed. For those who are unsure where it would be needed, we will have a printable map online at alberta.ca. The passes would be available for purchase online at albertarelm.com as well as at the same locations where fishing and hunting licences are sold, again, places that people are very used to accessing in Alberta for information on outdoor activities in this province. The cost of the pass is \$20 per individual and for a three-day pass, \$30 per person.

There are some exemptions for this bill, Madam Speaker, and I think this is important. The public land camping pass would not apply to lands under provincial park acts, private land, municipal or federal titled lands. It would also not apply to the exercise of the rights and traditional uses by First Nations, Métis communities, or the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation.

Due to the fact that the fee is for overnight camping on public land, it will also not apply to individuals, organizations, or companies conducting work according to their disposition for dispositions that are issued under the Public Lands Act, Forests Act, or exploration regulation. The same goes for commercial licence holders and their employees conducting duties relevant to their commercial licence under the wildlife regulation as well as municipal, provincial, and federal government employees and volunteers while conducting duties. While we feel it's important to charge these fees in order to conserve and maintain the stunning destinations in Alberta, we also realize the importance of the work these individuals do.

In order to make sure individuals who are random camping have a public land camping pass, there are staff who have the ability administer fines if need be. Any individuals 18 years of age and older that are camping in these areas would be asked to show proof of payment. Madam Speaker, a fee for random camping trailers was one of this government's election commitments and one we are proud to be going forward with.

On the issue of consultation from November 2020 to January 2021 we asked Albertans for ideas to help shape the future of sustainable recreation on Crown land in a public consultation. Two-thirds of the Albertans who responded were supportive or neutral of these fees to help maintain and protect these beautiful areas. I can tell you personally, having had several town halls and many, many conversations with constituents, that at a couple of the town halls we asked for a straw poll – put up your hand – and I can tell you that almost all of the hands went up. I've actually had people, constituents, coming to me asking for this to be done because they value our Crown lands. They know the value that it represents to all Albertans, and they want people to understand that value through paying a fee and to make sure that, of course, trails are maintained where there are bike trails and those sorts of things and also want

to make sure that when there's a mess left behind, there is the ability to clean it up.

In our consultations approximately 8,194 – that's approximate; let's say 8,200 rounded up – completed our public survey, and over 41,000 actually visited the survey site. On top of that, 17 stakeholder organizations provided submissions to discussion guide questions. That seems to me to be a fairly considerable consultation. I would say that that actually counts, so I think that we can firmly say that (a) we've been talking about this for quite some time – it's not a surprise – and (b) we consulted on it quite heavily.

Madam Speaker, the random camping has and continues to become more and more popular each and every year. While we encourage Albertans to get out and visit these great areas, the increased activities have had an impact on the environment such as, as I mentioned before, littering, damage to the lands, there's erosion on bike trails, those sorts of things, and then also camping that goes beyond 14 days and, unfortunately, the issue around dealing with human waste and such as that. Bill 64 will ensure that the department uses funds from the public land camping pass fees to improve the overall visitor experience through infrastructure upgrades, education, enforcement, public safety, and environmental and waste management.

For those who are concerned about these fees going into general revenue and not being able to sort out how the funds have been used, I'm pretty sure that most households in Alberta understand that you put your money into a main bank account, and then from that bank account you buy groceries and you pay your mortgage and you do this and you do that, and at the end of the month you can look and say: "Well, this much of the money went to this. This much of the money went to this. This much of the money went to that." You also know that money going into your account came from, you know, person A's employment, person B's employment, Judy's stipend for whatever. You know where the money came from. You know where the money is going. I don't think it's that hard to actually track it. I'm super unconcerned for these fees to be somehow lost. We need to understand that we're going to make sure that our lands are properly taken care of. That's what Albertans value. That's what they want. That's why they wanted this fee in the first place, so that's what will happen.

We expect net revenue from the public land camping pass to reach \$1.7 million in the first year and, with increasing compliance, in years following at \$2.7 million per year. This will help protect our great outdoors and allow Albertans to have the experience they deserve when they choose to get camping.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to support this bill, and I'm very appreciative of all the hard work that has been put into creating it. It's an important piece of legislation, which I hope we can all get behind. Our camping areas are part of what makes this province so great, and we need to do what we can to maintain them.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Sorry. My ears are not plugged. My face is, but I couldn't quite hear exactly what you said.

Thanks for the opportunity to say a few words around Bill 64, this Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021. You know, we're just seeing this in the last 24 hours or so. I think that I would reflect my colleagues' observations and comments on this mostly in the form of questions because there seem to be quite a lot of details that need

to be sorted out in regard to this bill. Certainly, I think that my questions and others will reflect, I think, what a lot of Albertans are wondering about as well.

4:40

Perhaps it wasn't the first thing I was going to talk about, but the hon. member just previous spoke about accountability and about budgeting and having the monies collected from this new user fee for public land and how that would be brought into the provincial coffers. What's important to understand – and I think all of us need perhaps a bit of a reminder about this – is that we build budgets here in the different ministries in the provincial Legislature in order to be accountable to the monies and where they come from and where they go. This notion that you just take a park fee, a user fee for public land, and you drop it into general revenues without having a legal requirement to account for that money is not responsible at first glance and probably at second glance and third glance, too.

I remember very specifically the federal government getting into a lot of trouble around this, around national park fees – right? – where you bought your national park pass for the day or for the season. Then it started to get out that the federal government was just putting it into general revenues. You thought you're buying that pass to pay for the picnic tables and the wardens and the roads and, you know, the interpretative sites and all of that, but in fact the money was just going into general revenues. I fear that we're setting up a very similar version of this here in the province by having a user fee charged to use a public land, on Crown land, and then just dropping it into general revenues. I'm very suspicious about that, and I know that anyone who has spoken favourably or in vague sympathy of this notion of having more money invested into public lands and people using and camping on public lands is doing it on the premise that that money needs to be put in there for security, for sanitation, for garbage collection, for enforcement of other statutes that apply to being in the bush and protecting the animals and the flora and the fauna that are there. Without that basic foundation built into Bill 64, I would find I'm skeptical from the beginning.

You know, I like to camp and to random camp just as much as anybody. One of the issues that I've had over the years around using Crown land for random camping is that people are not necessarily practising safe practices when using Crown land. You want to be out there, but you want to be safe. You want to make sure that others are safe as well in regard to human hygiene, in regard to activities with motor vehicles, with firearms and so forth, fires as well. So there's a certain standard that people I think would expect, especially if they're paying a \$30 fee or a \$20 fee for three days per person, by the way, to use that public land. That's not an unimportant part of, I think, the question around this bill, and I think it needs to be explored much, much further.

Another issue that I would like just to discuss briefly here is around enforcement, right? If you create a new law where people need to spend the \$20 or the \$30 per person to utilize the public land, there's got to be a mechanism by which you can ensure that people are in fact following that rule. If it's just written on paper and there's nothing there to enforce that, then you probably are only going to be collecting a fraction. Some people will dutifully pay, and other people won't. Again, when you set up something like this, you've got to make sure that you have explicitly a mechanism by which we are demonstrating enforcement and demonstrating equity in that enforcement so that some people are paying, some people aren't, and so forth. That's the problem.

Another issue I think that this government needs to face – of course, we're here to give free advice because that's what we are as the Official Opposition – is the question dealing with credibility or the lack of credibility that this UCP government has around their

governance and stewardship of parks in general. We saw a huge folderol over the last year in regard to a list of parks that were going to be delisted, a list of places that would be downgraded. I mean, I don't have to tell you what happened, right? The public outcry was significant, and this government had to backtrack. Now, once you do that once or you do that twice, people go, "Well, you know, we're not going to get fooled again," right? "Here they are with another public land thing that talks about camping, talks about the recreation that I like to enjoy with my family and so forth. What's the catch this time? What are they doing that's going to make it more expensive, that's going to reduce access, that's going to reduce safety and all of the other things that I mentioned before?" You know, that whole saga around provincial campsites and provincial parks and so forth really has focused the attention of Albertans around this valuable resource that we all own together.

You know, I've heard it time and time again. It's the old thing of talking out of two sides of your mouth, right? We can't see people doing that literally with these masks on, but, here, I'll give you an example where somebody – I'm sure it was in the debate last night – will say: "Well, why should I be paying twice? It's not as though something is free because I'm paying it through my taxes, and that tax is part of what I have together. It's the thing that I own together and I pay for as an Alberta citizen." Well, I think that public land probably falls into that category in the most fundamental basic sort of way. It is Crown land that we all own together, collectively.

This notion that, "Oh, well, nothing is for free, and you should pay your way," and all that kind of thing: well, we do pay. We pay together for the ownership and the stewardship of the land that we have as public land, as Crown land here in the province of Alberta, right? So you put a user fee on top of that, and it's like you're double charging for the thing that you already paid for in the first place as a citizen and a taxpayer here in the province of Alberta. That doublespeak, where we hear what's being said on one side of our mouth on some issues and then the other side of the mouth on other issues, you know, people don't like that. They see through it.

I don't know. Like, I'm really wondering. I'm looking at social media here with this new-found fee that people are going to be expected to pay starting on June 1. Is that what I just heard? Okay. Holy smokes, that's just coming right around the corner, right? You know, people are getting ready. They're making their plans to go camping. I know that people have booked their provincial campsites already. It's a very popular thing to do. What exactly is the mechanism on how this is going to hit the ground to start charging, to get people into the regular idea of paying these fees and the services they might expect as a result of paying these fees all in six weeks? I wonder. I really do wonder about that.

People are going to wonder where they have to pay, how they're going to pay, what part of Alberta they are going to have to pay in. I mean, I heard some vague sort of sketch of what encompasses the eastern slopes as defined by Bill 64, but you'd better get that out to the rest of the people in Alberta because, I mean, you know, my feeling is this. The eastern slopes, the water in Alberta, literally the western boundary of our province is defined by the continental divide, right? All of the province pretty much up to Grande Prairie and all the way north is the eastern slopes. That's which way the water goes. How far does that extend towards the east? That's the \$30 question for paying those fees quite literally. If I'm choosing to canoe in the eastern part of Alberta, like, I mean, where's that point where the shoreline turns from 30 bucks for camping and then goes to free camping? I think that that's a fair question.

I'm planning a canoe trip right now. I would like to know where I'm going to have to pay this thing and in what part of the province I am meant to pay it if I do have to pay at all. That's another question right there. The provincial Crown land: does that extend to the

edges of waterways? You know, I plan a canoe trip, and then off I go. I camp on the side of the high-water mark. Is that a place where you have to pay this 30 bucks or 20 bucks for three days or whatever as a camping fee? We need to get all of those details out in the next six weeks, have that mechanism in place, and hope that Albertans don't react negatively to this.

4:50

And I must say, I mean, on first blush, I am definitely reacting negatively to this because, first and foremost, I think that it's very important that we have an affordable way by which people can recreate close to their homes here in the province of Alberta. I represent a constituency by and large where their primary source of recreation is to go somewhere within a few hundred kilometres of Edmonton, right? They might go camping for the weekend at the local lake. They might hit it off, you know, along the forestry trunk line and do some fishing and some random camping or canoeing or whatever, but it's the affordable way by which you can recreate in this province in the summer with your family or in the winter, too. This idea of putting a monetization on Crown land, public land, categorically makes me very critical about this.

Also in this bill – and again, correct me if I'm wrong. I'd be happy to hear the minister tell us the details of this, but this bill does not preclude the possibility of having day-use charges for that use of that same public land here in the province of Alberta. We've already seen that starting to happen in places like Kananaskis and cross-country ski trails that are being monetized somehow. You know, this notion that you wander off into the woods for an afternoon with your family on a public provincial line, and you somehow are being handed a bill for that at the end of your walk, again, I think goes against the basic notion of the common good. It goes against the notion of the public good. Again, I fear that Bill 64 charging for camping on public land without any guarantees of some added service of safety and sanitation and care and stewardship directed to that fee – I'm deeply skeptical on that as well.

I mean, those are my initial thoughts around this bill. I know that lots of Albertans are listening and interested. You know, driving around my neighbourhood, I see all the tent trailers and whatnot and canoes in people's backyards, right? I mean, this is a direct thing that affects the choices that people are going to make in the next six weeks. We have to make sure that we have answers to those questions. We have to have justification for those questions, and quite frankly at this juncture I believe that myself and the opposition are deeply skeptical of the nature and the structure and the intention of this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today to speak to Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021. You know, sometimes you don't really realize that you're significantly different from other people in the world, that Albertans actually have a culture, that we're actually different from people around the rest of this world, until you get a new fresh set of eyes that come in. Every once in a while we get family that comes over from Europe or from England and sometimes we get family that comes from down east, and you don't really realize just how different Albertans are and our culture is until you see Alberta through their eyes.

I can remember walking through my hometown where I live – I live in Drayton Valley – and we had some family from England

over, and they were absolutely amazed that it seemed like at every single house in Drayton Valley there was some form of a camper, some form of a mobile home, some form of an ATV, some form of vehicle that would help them to get out into nature and into the backcountry where Drayton Valley is on the edge of. They were just absolutely astounded that something that they just didn't do was such a natural part of the life of the Albertans that I live with on a daily basis. For all of us that have grown up in Alberta, in this absolutely gorgeous province, it's just a part of who we are.

I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West often talks about going canoeing out in my neck of the woods in the Drayton Valley area on the North Saskatchewan.

Mr. Eggen: It's our neck of the woods.

Mr. Smith: Our neck of the woods. I might share it with you for a little bit here.

You know, I can remember being in junior high and taking the hunter education program. For some of you – I don't know. I believe it's still available. It was done through our junior high school in Edmonton, Hillcrest junior high school, being taken out. We were random camping in the middle of winter. We must be either pretty silly or they must have been very brave teachers or something because it was literally 30 below and they're taking a bunch of junior high kids out to go random camping beside a lake.

I can remember that it was so cold that I learned a very valuable lesson. The first thing you do when you're winter camping is start a fire. We started to try to build our lean-to and our shelter and realized very quickly that it got very, very cold. We eventually got our fire started but not before our fingers were numb. I realized that when I picked up my knife by the blade, it can actually burn; it can get so cold. I can remember that one of our kids set his sleeping bag on fire. At 30 below that's actually an important thing you've got to deal with. I can remember that when we were finished our random camping after being there for three days and we went back to the buses, not one of the buses would start, and we had to start a small fire underneath each of the engines to warm the oil up and to get the engines warm enough to be able to turn over.

That's life in Alberta. We are used to being outside, we're used to being in nature, and we're used to taking advantage of the glorious opportunities that we have on the eastern slopes. I know that when I was growing up, our family would go down those forestry trunk roads camping almost every summer, well, not every summer but a lot of the summers. Those family vacations, those memories stick with you.

I can remember taking my own kids down to Lake Abraham and going hiking. Just even this past spring my wife and I went down to Lake Abraham. It was so windy there, we almost got blown off our feet. I mean, the gusting wind was – some day I'll show you the pictures there, David, and you can see just what it was like. I remember going camping near Crescent Falls before there was really much of a road going into Crescent Falls, my car breaking down, having to try to fix it in the middle of the bush. That's just who we are as Albertans. We enjoy the fact that we live near some of the best scenery anywhere in the world. My son is presently living in Montreal and has a young lady in his life. She came out to visit us here a couple of years ago. She'd never seen the Rocky Mountains. We often take it for granted.

What does this have to do with the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021? Well, what I'm trying to show you here is that for us in Alberta having access to those public lands is absolutely critically important to who we are. Random camping is when you're heading into the woods and you're camping in a nondesignated area on public lands. For many this has more of an authentic camping feel

to it than going to a national park, where the amenities are there and the roads are there and the parking sites are there.

There are rules for random camping. You know, you can't be doing it within one kilometre of a provincial or national park. You're encouraged to minimize your impact. You cannot camp on vegetation. You must find a place with minimal vegetation, in sand and gravel. You're encouraged to use compact stoves, camping stoves. It's not that you can't have a fire, but you try to minimize your scars on the land. I can remember when I would be random camping as a university student and later on in life. You always looked around the camping site and said: did you leave it cleaner than when you got there? Yeah. You could build a proper firepit, but it had to be a proper firepit. Garbage: if you tracked it in, you tracked it out. Albertans understand that – most Albertans understand that – that the waterways that we have have to be protected, have to be taken care of. So there are rules in place for the protection of our backcountry.

5:00

Now, sometimes, sadly, this doesn't happen, and it's partly why we need to have this bill. You know, many Albertans, the people who horseback ride into the backcountry, who have ATVs, who hike: these are the people that are the most disappointed when they realize that the guidelines have not been followed, and it's these Albertans and it's the clubs that they belong to that have actually lobbied for Bill 64.

You know, it was a few years ago that the previous government brought in some rules and regulations to try to deal with the backcountry that were very unpopular because they were perceived by the people that used the backcountry as trying to freeze them out of the backcountry and not allowing them to go into that backcountry. They didn't believe that there had been proper consultation. This legislation, though, is the result of a long period of consultation with these stakeholders, and it's actually a reflection of what these stakeholders have asked for.

Let me give you just a couple of them. When we did our consultations and we asked for their opinions about this legislation, one of the ones that I remember working with – and I'll get Garrett Schmidt, the president of the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association, to speak to this, get his name on record. He's quoted as saying: the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association has long advocated for user-funding models that invest back into the activities that Albertans enjoy to support meaningful and managed recreation that ensures the sustainability both of the activity and our environment.

I know Garrett, and I know many of the people that every weekend in the summer take off to go into the backcountry and are using their ATVs or their horses or just hiking. You know, they are the ones that care the most about making sure that their activities are being done in an environmentally responsible way, and it's they and their clubs that are insistent that when they use the backcountry, there is a process and there are funds for making sure that the trails are kept up, that the waterways that they're going over are not being disrupted, that the lands that they are using are going to be there for their children and their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren. They're the ones that truly, really understand just how important this piece of legislation really is.

He goes on: some of our members' clubs and other groups volunteer to maintain some of the random camping and staging areas on public lands, and we are glad to see this government's commitment to implementing and supporting solutions that ensure future generations' ability to enjoy.

Madam Speaker, I've met with some of these clubs. I've gone into the backcountry with some of these clubs. I've taken some of

these ATV trails. I've been on the backs of horses and gone into the Sundre area. In fact, I think one of the things that I'll take to the grave, one of the memories that I will take to my grave is coming up over a ridge just as the sun is beginning to go down and seeing a herd of about 300 to 400 elk grazing on a high alpine pasture. I would never have had the opportunity to see that part of nature and to see something that very few people will ever get a chance to see. We have that opportunity in Alberta, but we need to make sure that when we have those opportunities, we're maintaining the trails and that the clubs and the people that are using this have the resources that they need, through this piece of legislation, to be able to make sure that we can enjoy while maintaining the environment so that our future generations will continue to be able to have those kinds of experiences.

It's agreed by many, Madam Speaker, that that means that you're going to have to have some enforcement in order to be able to maintain the rules and the regulations. The people and the clubs that use the eastern slopes and the backcountry are actually asking for this legislation so that there is a capacity to be able to fund and enforce the environmental regulations and the backwoods camping regulations so that we can make sure that that is continuing to be there for generations to come. In Alberta we have traditionally and historically adopted a user-pay system, and this fits in with that tradition.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, critics of the bill – and we've heard some of that today – would say that we're nickel and diming families' pocketbooks, but these fees are actually very reasonable. We're looking at a proposed \$20-per-person pass for three nights or a \$30-per-person pass for an entire year. For just about anybody's pocketbook, we can see that that is affordable, and what's probably most important is that what it's going to ensure is that when you do go out into that backcountry, it's actually an experience that you will be able to enjoy because we've had the capacity to enforce, to pick up the garbage, to maintain the trails, and to make sure that you're enjoying a world-class experience.

These fees are only meant, Mr. Speaker, to offset the costs involved with the enforcement and the current rules for enforcement and for enhancing our public lands. This fee is in no way different than the purpose for collecting the fees for camping in our national or our provincial parks, and it remains an affordable option for almost every Albertan. Most importantly, Albertans told us that they would be willing to pay such a fee as this in order to enjoy the outdoors in exchange for the environmental capacity to take care of our environment so that they could enjoy this when they go out into the backcountry.

You know, I know that I've had many conversations with the minister – you're not going to shut me down are you? Okay. Thank you for your time, and I'll maybe get back into this a little later.

Thank you.

The Speaker: It's only the clock that would set the speaking limits, not the Speaker. I'm merely a humble servant of the Assembly.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise in the House and add my comments on Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021. It's not the only problem that this bill is purporting, Mr. Speaker. When I look at the pattern and the debate we had last night on the bills and the work that's been done in the Assembly for the

past two years, I've come to the conclusion that the government is somehow too much indulged in right-wing, popular ideas, and they're not convinced yet to look at the two years, at least, of history. They don't want to go back and check their facts and learn from it.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is going through very unprecedented, challenging times. We have seen the low oil prices crisis. That is also raising one question. When we were wise enough and worried for the well-being of our province, that was the very time when we needed to brainstorm and initiate thought processes, being one of the large oil-producing places around the globe. What went wrong compared to countries like Norway? We could not even suffer a setback for months when countries depending on similar commodities and economic structure actually saved billions in reserves for the difficult times.

In 2019 we saw that the government was not really, you know, open to learning anything about it. They had the idea, and they moved with that idea, and since then, after implementing their belief that it's the responsibility of the big corporations to come in instead of the communities, it has not provided anyone – the opposition already didn't believe in that. The government has nothing to claim that those measures, the steps, the actions taken by the government have in any way contributed to our province.

As I said, the province is going through a very unprecedented time, with more than a quarter of a million people unemployed in the province right now. The whole world is, you know, going through very historic moments, facing the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic and Albertans are, too, by having lost their jobs and going through stressful times dealing with strict health orders. This was the time, after a year and a half, when we could probably offer something to the public that would not even add a cost. We could encourage people to get out and experience our beautiful provincial parks, that would give them a healthy environment.

The other thing I just wanted to add: I don't know how this government came to the conclusion during this specific time that they thought the province was not in the capacity to maintain its operations the way it's been going on for decades and centuries. What impact has it created during COVID, when more and more people are actually staying home? Was there a rising challenge for the government for the past one year so that they came to the conclusion that they need to legislate these user fees onto the very Albertans that need support from our government more than ever? I think that the government is, as I said, not willing to learn.

I was listening to CBC radio on the way to work, and a former Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, actually was the host speaking on the radio. He answered the question: how do you view this time compared to when you were in office? He just delivered one message: you know, I was not left, and I was not right; when there was a challenge, I always looked both ways, and I never ruled out one side of the idea because of its name, so this is how I tried to learn and govern the country.

What I see: within this government that is not the approach. The government is not willing to learn. There are broad experiences around the globe. I know that the Premier has actually made trips to countries like India, and he would have gotten a chance to see the pros and cons, good and bad, in things happening around, but it doesn't seem like he's really, actually willing to learn and apply all those experiences here in Alberta.

The governments around the globe who have moved towards this idea of imposing everything on the public, with the idea of leaving the free market for the superrich corporations, and then the feeling that the public and citizens should pay for each and every public

cost have become disastrous. When I see this, I also see in this bill, compared to the government's approach – we have debated the youth wage rollback that will create youth employment; instead, that actually created an unemployment rate higher in this province among youths. I saw on TV that the Premier even tried to blame the opposition party as believing in imposing more taxes on ordinary Albertans.

But, in fact, the pattern and the work we are seeing and we're experiencing in this House show that the government is not really sparing in any aspect of the sectors to Albertans: creeping the bracket, approximately \$600 million more in taxes being collected from Albertans. By not quoting inflation and population growth, the education property taxes will come more, in hundreds of millions of dollars, to the government. We were debating the bill purporting the idea, again, that the government is not responsible to provide these services to their citizens and municipalities.

5:20

What we are seeing in this bill right now is not only proposing new fees at a time when Albertans need more help and encouragement from this government. Also, the concept, contrary to what I heard from the government House members, something that I remember receiving e-mails from the community members and community organizations on: when the casino funds were established, they wouldn't have probably gone through if the idea behind that was not to focus to help the community organizations, cultural groups, nonprofits within the province. That was the very argument that convinced people to agree with their idea.

Now, what had happened: those casino funds have been moved by this government into general revenue. The consequences we have seen: loads of e-mails, complaints, calls from community organizations, social organizations. They're not really able to access those funds that they have in the past. The applications are not being approved. On the contrary, they are receiving the letters that their organizations will get an audit, that they have a conflict of interest, not to use this money in this respect, the same thing that we are seeing here in the name of improving the infrastructure, services, roads.

I will raise this question again: why at this time would the government propose a fee structure with the very belief that they think the ordinary people should pay for everything even when they're struggling with a high unemployment rate, struggling with putting, actually, food on the table for the families and making payments for mortgages? Specifically, I wanted to give a stress on high utility fees. This concept cannot be supported, Mr. Speaker, so I do not support this bill.

I want to conclude my remarks with this. Thank you.

The Speaker: Just perfectly on time. Well done.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to speak to the bill? The Member for Edmonton-West Henday has the call.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021. I appreciate the opportunity. No doubt, as we consider opportunities to get out of the house, of course, as safe as possible in following the health guidelines, this is a conversation that is important, in the grand scheme of things, to ensuring the sustainability and the protection of public lands for future generations. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to that matter.

I am also thankful, as I continue to listen to the debate this afternoon, to all members who have stood and spoken to the

importance of opportunities like camping across our province and other leisure activities. I thank them for that. Of course, I have had that opportunity as well to spend time, most recently, at Pembina provincial park, doing some camping there. It's been a while, Mr. Speaker, but that has happened in the past. I appreciate that those opportunities are here within our province and the beautiful landscapes that Alberta has to offer families.

While we are considering this legislation and how it will affect the future use of parks and the future costs of public lands, I think, you know, we have to look back at some of the decisions that this UCP government has made up to this point, especially when we talk about the cost that is being considered here in this legislation and how this legislation is going to roll out and especially, once again, about how that funding that is collected by the provincial government is going to be used. I'm thankful to the members who have stood and spoken to the fact that there are no assurances through this legislation that these funds that are being collected through Bill 64 are going to be used specific to things like enforcement of rules and enforcement of this legislation itself and no assurances from the government that those funds are going to be spent on renewal of these campgrounds or maintenance of these campgrounds.

When I look at the conversation that has happened online through social media around Bill 64 – of course, very early stages of this legislation – there is a lot of concern. While there are some people who flat out don't support the idea of fees altogether or expanding fees on these lands, there are others who say: well, I might be willing to consider it if we see value for the investment or value for the fees that are being collected.

Unfortunately, from what we've seen in the past of this UCP government, it's hard, as I said last evening, for Albertans to take this government and the proposals that are being put forward at face value. When we even were considering a piece of legislation yesterday about increasing costs to 911 services and the importance of upgrading those services – of course, it's a consideration that has to be made – the fact is that it is going to cost Albertans more to have those services, and there are no assurances, once again, in that instance that the services will actually be getting better. In that respect, we've seen that the centralization of those services has gotten worse.

We can look to other instances, whether it be changes to the AGLC funds that are collected and how that is being used and put into general revenue instead of opportunities for Albertans to see exactly how that money is being spent, especially when it comes to – community groups in our community that often rely on those funds now have less transparency around how that money is being spent. It's, I would say, easy to understand why Albertans are concerned and why, when we look within Bill 64 and the decision that this government has made to not create a dedicated revenue fund where this money would be transparently used and Albertans would have further assurances that it would be spent on the things that the government is saying it will be spent on, they are rightfully concerned.

As previous members have asked – and I would pose the same question, whether those options were considered. When the discussions around this legislation and the formation of this legislation were happening, were there options explored by the department and by the ministry that would ensure that the revenues raised were going to only be spent on public lands management? If that was the case, I think that we would all appreciate it if the minister was willing to speak to why exactly through those conversations we don't see that explored or expanded upon here in this legislation.

There are questions around limitations or exactly what the future might be for these fees, if we could see an expansion of further fees past the \$30 that is being proposed in here for annual passes or the \$20 per person for a three-day pass. I imagine that in those considerations through the ministry this might just be the beginning of those conversations, so what can we expect on the horizon that is being enabled through Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021? Those are the questions that I'm hearing from people in the community and discussions online.

You know, when I think about some of the work that we did in government – and a member alluded to it earlier from the opposition caucus here – we spent time in our time in government creating new parks systems and protecting environmentally sensitive ones, and what we've seen from this government so far is a willingness to delist them.

5:30

Further, when we consider the proposals that are being put forward by this government regarding the eastern slopes, I think that Albertans are also rightfully concerned that if you're an Australian private corporation, you can come in and buy hectares of land from this government for the same price or similar prices as some families are going to be charged for three-day passes or annual passes to use parks that, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, are already being paid for through their taxes.

The Member for Edmonton-North West alluded to the fact that what we're looking at here is essentially Albertans being double-taxed on very important resources within our communities. That really goes back to the fact that if this money is being collected, if there are going to be fees imposed on Albertans for accessing this public land, they need assurances that it is going to be spent in the community that they are paying those fees in or, at the very least, that it's going to be spent to strengthen and enforce legislation and bylaws as well as maintain these very important lands across our province. We need those reassurances, and unfortunately we are not seeing that through Bill 64.

I once again have to think about, as many members have alluded to at this point this afternoon, the way that we're seeing this government impose fees on Albertans: conversations around fishing licence fees, the idea of tolls on bridges across the province, potentially on public infrastructure of all sorts, whether it's highways or other infrastructure in communities. I'm very concerned, because while we take these pieces one at a time and might consider it nickel and diming Albertans – of course, the cost is much more than nickel and diming – these fees add up. They have compounding effects.

When we talk about fishing licences, when we talk about potential tolls on infrastructure, when we talk about fees that are being proposed through this legislation, it is becoming a lot more expensive for Albertans to enjoy the nature that we have to offer in our province, and that's very concerning. Of course, Mr. Speaker, it goes much further than that when we consider things like this government's decision to remove insurance caps on Alberta drivers, costing hundreds if not thousands of dollars extra for Albertans across the province. When we consider the decision from this government to remove utility caps that our government had put in place, Albertans are seeing fees skyrocketing in all instances.

It's very unfortunate that instead of, to some extent, working within the parameters that we have before us in our current budget, this government, one, is willing to increase fees of all sorts but, two, not willing to be transparent with how those fees are being spent. It's extremely unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. It really once again goes back to the lack of credibility that this government has when it comes to consultations, when it comes to spending Alberta's money wisely, or at least to the perception of that money being spent

wisely. Look no further than the \$30-million-a-year war room and the embarrassment that that has been on a national and an international level.

Albertans are rightfully concerned about the decisions and the direction of this government and how their dollars are being spent. Once again, while there might be a level of support for something like fees, whether they're these ones or others, the fact is that Albertans do not trust that this government is going to reinvest that money in the way that they are saying they are going to, especially with the lack of that being detailed in Bill 64.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, people want accountability, and it doesn't seem to be here in this legislation. As other members have spoken about, June 1 is the proposed date for this to come into effect. So while Albertans are considering how they might explore Alberta through camping, potentially, and they are making those plans, of course, once again, following the health guidelines that have been set out by the province, I think that they are in for an awakening when they go to pay for these fees. There is a jump in those expenses. There is an increase in those expenses.

Once again, when we look at how this government has made decisions about how money is being spent in other situations, we look at the Ministry of Children's Services, for instance, with hundreds of millions of dollars unspent in that budget and an unwillingness to ensure that that money is being spent effectively, as far as we can tell, simply to be able to add that back into general revenue, as we're seeing here. No accountability.

When we look at Community and Social Services and the administration of the AISH program, we saw this government trying to pull some funny accounting tactics – not really funny for the people that are trying to access those funds – to try and make their budget look more balanced than it was. Once again, when we reflect on changes to the AGLC and how money is being funded for important programs across our province within the AGLC, Albertans are not left with much confidence that this government is going to make the right decision, is going to spend the funds how they're saying they're going to, and is going to be transparent about how those funds are being spent, which is very concerning. At the end of the day, it seems to be the biggest problem within this piece of legislation.

Now, once again, when we look at what's in here, a requirement for a public land camping pass for people aged 18 years or older when random camping on public lands in the eastern slopes – of course, a majority of the random camping that happens in the province is in those areas – and the cost proposal for those camping passes, \$20 a day per person for a three-day pass or \$30 per person for an annual pass, we need to ensure that that money is being reinvested in a way that is sustainable in terms of the enforcement and the maintenance of these resources and of these public lands.

I also appreciate the comments that have been made by the opposition caucus here in terms of the problematic history that this government has when it comes to consultation on public lands, when it comes to the consultation around our provincial parks. They saw exactly what happens when you try to bring in legislation or bring in rules without properly consulting and without listening to Albertans. They received a lot of push-back from that, probably one of the largest push-backs that I've seen in this term, one of them, though there have been several, of course, Mr. Speaker. That was one instance where we saw a major outcry from the public. While we're thankful that that process was paused, there's always another day for this government to bring that forward again, so people should continue to be concerned about that process moving forward.

No doubt, we must work to protect these lands, and if that includes . . .

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, anyone else wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika is on his feet.

Mr. Schow: It took me a while, Mr. Speaker, but I got there. It's a long way up. The air is a little thinner up here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. It's my pleasure to speak briefly on this bill. I just wanted to rise here and tell everybody how much I love the outdoors and getting out there. During these difficult times, exploring Alberta, I think, is a great option for us given that we have certain restrictions within our province. I think it's safe to say that being outdoors, getting that vitamin D from the sun, is just a great way to spend our time. I'm grateful that we have, I would argue, the most beautiful landscapes in the country. I often argue that Cardston-Siksika is God's country. Well, I think Alberta in general is God's country, and I think we could all agree with that. That's why I encourage my fellow Albertans to get out there and enjoy it, especially now, in these difficult times.

5:40

I would love to go on and on and talk about how much I love the outdoors and taking opportunities to enjoy it with my family, but I think that now is a great time to adjourn debate, so I move that.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 66 Public Health Amendment Act, 2021

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 66.

As you know, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2021, Bill 66, outlines the next steps in the Alberta government's plan to modernize the act and to provide greater transparency during public health emergencies. The health and safety of all Albertans is and will always be a top priority for Alberta's government. The Public Health Act is one of Alberta's oldest pieces of legislation. The last time it was updated was in 2002, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. At that time the government introduced emergency measures to enable government action in extraordinary circumstances, and the COVID-19 pandemic was the first time in Alberta's history when these measures were used to declare a state of public health emergency. It was at a time when no one really knew if the government would be able to continue as normal and how we would ensure that vital public services would continue to operate.

That's why Alberta's Legislative Assembly created the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee, with a mandate to review the act. Their role was to determine if the legislation could be improved in light of our experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this review the committee heard from many Albertans and received hundreds of submissions. I want to thank all members of the committee for their work to listen to Albertans' concerns and to provide recommendations on how to modernize the Public Health Act. The proposed amendments will reflect current and emerging public health challenges and best practices and help Alberta's government respond quickly to public health issues, including chronic diseases, and protect the health and safety of Albertans.

One of the largest concerns expressed by Albertans during these consultations with the committee was the emergency powers of ministers. Albertans expressed concerns that these ministerial powers, which first, as I said, were added to the act in 2002 in light

of the 9/11 attacks, were an overreach. What we've learned over the last year is that the Assembly is able to adapt to meet safely. The Legislature was able to continue to successfully debate, and the government has passed critical legislation to support lives and to support livelihoods through this extraordinary time.

Now, these amendments would repeal the provisions that were not only just added in 2002, Mr. Speaker, but also in Bill 10, the Public Health (Emergency Powers) Amendment Act, 2020. In fact, all sections under the act that empower a minister to modify legislation by ministerial order would be repealed. As I said, this includes repealing the sections that were added in 2002, giving power to a minister to modify enactments. I want to be clear that while the proposed amendments repeal these authorities, this bill will not affect the current public health measures, nor will it limit our ability to respond effectively to the pandemic.

Checks and balances play an important role in balancing protection of public health with individual rights, and many of the proposed amendments in Bill 66 enhance individual rights and create additional safeguards while maintaining the government's ability to respond to public health challenges. For example, Bill 66 would remove the authority of government to mandate immunizations or conscript individuals to support a public health emergency. Albertans told us that this is an extreme authority that infringes on their civil liberties.

Dr. Hinshaw was asked by the select special review committee, when she came before them to provide her evidence, if she supported government having the power to mandate vaccines. She responded by saying the following:

I don't see an example where that would be used. I think that if we have a piece of legislation that we're unlikely to use, I'm not sure it provides much benefit. So I would be comfortable with that particular piece of the legislation being removed.

Alberta's government supports Dr. Hinshaw's position, and we're following through on our commitment to repeal that section of the act. We know that the vast majority of Albertans will voluntarily opt to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when eligible, and I know that I will. Alberta has one of the best vaccine rollouts in the country. I encourage all Albertans to book their shot when it's their turn. Alberta's approach to encouraging immunization is focused on education. It's focused on information sharing and providing data-driven evidence to support Albertans to make their own informed decisions.

In addition, Bill 66 clarifies and enhances individual rights in the act, and this includes the following: first, ensuring that individuals are informed of the location if they are being detained; second, establishing criteria that must be met before requiring an individual to be treated or examined; and third, establishing criteria for how personal health information is collected or disclosed under the act.

Albertans are clear that they want transparent information sharing from government when responding to a public health emergency. Bill 66 includes a new requirement to publish orders that apply to the public or if it applies to groups online; that is, that it would publish online orders that apply to groups or the public. This would help increase Albertans' awareness of public health measures and help make sure that they can find information quickly on what measures are in place.

On top of that, as recommended by the review committee, we are making periodic review of the act a requirement. If passed, the act would be reviewed every 10 years to ensure that it continues to address the public health needs of Albertans.

The recommendations of the select special committee included amending the legislation to better reflect current and emerging public health challenges and practices, and we've taken the recommendations and found additional opportunities to modernize the Public

Health Act through this legislation. These changes better reflect the state of the province today and what we've learned through the COVID-19 pandemic so we are better positioned for the future. This includes establishing the qualifications of the chief medical officer of health in the act, which is in line with other Canadian jurisdictions.

The amendments would also clarify that someone under an isolation order is not limited from working from home if they are able. The existing provisions do not take into account the modern ability to work from home. The amendments would update the legislation to clarify that an employee may work from home if isolating and if they are able to do so.

The amendments would also add sections to the act to address chronic diseases and preventable injuries. When the Public Health Act was written, the concerns of public health were focused mostly on communicable diseases. Now, as we know, in the current legislation, the current form of the Public Health Act, part 3, communicable diseases, is the most significant part of that act. While keeping Albertans safe from communicable diseases is still important, still relevant, especially now that we are in the middle of a pandemic, we know that chronic disease and preventable injuries are growing health concerns. In fact, chronic disease is the leading cause of death for Albertans and accounts for the largest share of health care costs.

By adding new sections to strengthen the province's work to prevent chronic disease, this aligns Alberta with other provinces across Canada. Additionally, it gives the chief medical officer of health the legislative authority to monitor, to report on, and to engage in public health planning related to chronic diseases. This would be in a specific geographical area, or it could be province-wide. Ultimately, by proposing to include chronic disease and preventable injuries in the Public Health Act, we'll have the additional tools to provide information and engage in prevention

activities to help improve the lives of people living with chronic disease such as diabetes, arthritis, or heart disease.

As part of these modernization amendments and to support government's red tape reduction initiative, we're also proposing to repeal section 70 and the regulated matter regulation. This means that Albertans who use inhalants as an intoxicant will no longer be fined for their addiction. These measures are unique in Alberta and are inappropriately punitive for vulnerable Albertans. Alberta's government has made recovery-oriented treatment for people who use substances a priority, and removing these measures will support recovery rather than enforce fines and imprisonment.

5:50

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Albertans want and they deserve a government to strike the right balance between the rights of individuals and the measures needed to protect public health, and Bill 66 would do just that. I want to thank all those Albertans who shared their thoughts, who shared their ideas, their feedback, their input on the Public Health Act. Their important feedback shaped the amendments that are proposed in Bill 66. The amendments would also deliver on the commitment that I made in October 2020 to repeal sections of Bill 10, the Public Health (Emergency Powers) Amendment Act, 2020. I ask for your support for second reading of Bill 66, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2021.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader, perhaps.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn till 7:30 this evening.

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

Table of Contents

Prayers	4457
Members' Statements	
Municipal Funding and Bill 56	4457
Ramadan	4457
Vaisakhi and the Sikh Community	4457
Support for Persons and Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19	4458
Lethbridge Business and Industry	4458
Legislative Assembly Staff and COVID-19	4458
History	4458
Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum	4459
Restaurants and COVID-19	4459
Oral Question Period	
Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19	4460, 4462
Postsecondary Tuition Fees	4460
COVID-19 and Child Care	4461
COVID-19 Cases among Premier's Staff	4461
Summer Outdoor Events	4462
COVID-19 Related Public Health Order Enforcement	4463
Rural Health Facility Upgrades and Renovations	4463
Child Care in Northern Alberta	4464
Chief Medical Officer of Health Briefings on COVID-19	4464
Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum	4465
Fees for Recreation on Public Lands	4466
Indigenous Content in Educational Curriculum	4466
Rural Development	4467
Rural Crime Prevention	4467
Notices of Motions	4468
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 67 Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act	4468
Tablings to the Clerk	4468
Orders of the Day	4470
Government Motions	
HRH, The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh	4470
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 64 Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021	4475
Bill 66 Public Health Amendment Act, 2021	4487

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