



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 14, 2021

Day 97

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

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

Fees for Recreation on Public Lands

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted more Albertans than ever to get outdoors. Last year we saw folks eager to get out to our provincial parks, but many Albertans also tried their hand at camping and recreating in the backcountry. I want to be clear. This is a positive thing. Getting outdoors is a safe and healthy way to spend time with friends and family as we move through the pandemic.

But increased activity in the province's beautiful backyard also highlighted an issue that has persisted for years, one that has been made worse by the pandemic. Last summer we saw garbage and human waste left in our parks and on public lands as well as illegal tree cutting and other offences. We also saw some inexperienced hikers and campers get injured, or they got lost. We also, sadly, saw several deaths in the eastern slopes. Since that time we've been talking to Albertans and groups that represent the folks who frequent the backcountry about how we can address these issues. One of the solutions many pointed to was a modest fee that would support protection of our treasured wild spaces as well as education for Albertans on how to safely and responsibly use the backcountry.

To that end, we tabled Bill 64 on Monday, which allows for the implementation of a \$30 annual fee for backcountry camping. Revenue generated will go directly back into putting more boots on the ground to protect and educate folks who recreate in the eastern slopes. This includes watercourse and trail remediation. We also hired an additional 50 on-the-ground staff, including 20 new conservation officers. This approach is supported by a broad array of groups, from hikers and conservationists to municipal leaders and OHV users. It's a win-win for Albertans and for the air, land, water, and wildlife in the eastern slopes, arguably the most beautiful area of the province.

I hope we can count on the opposition to support Bill 64.

Educational Curriculum Redesign and Critical Thinking Skills

Ms Ganley: Information: it has become more and more important in our lives. It is readily available to more people than it ever has been at any time in history, but information is not wisdom, and in these cases, often information is not information at all. That's why it's more important than ever that our children learn critical thinking,

learn to assess and evaluate information for themselves so they don't have to take anyone's word for truth.

There are a lot of things that concern me about the UCP's backwards curriculum, but, for me, this one is huge. We live in a time when studies are designed not with the intention of discovering truth but manufacturing it, where statistics are picked selectively to make a point, where questions are asked not to discover what people think but to influence it. Information and misinformation surround us. The ability to tell the difference is critical to each and every one of our lives, to being able to thrive in the economy of the future, to being good citizens, and to navigating the massive challenges that lie before us.

If there is one thing I want my child and every child in this province to learn, it's how to analyze an argument for its premises, stated and unstated, experimental design, statistics, how emotions and values influence what we see as supposedly neutral data because it will prepare them for the world. Learning multiple perspectives is important. Learning nuance, that multiple things can be true at once, that sometimes the dominant perspective is wrong, and that history itself can be badly distorted is all-important.

The UCP's curriculum takes that from our kids, these critical tools that allow them to go on to reassess everything that we teach them and evaluate it, to look at the way we currently see reality and find the errors in it. I want the next generation to surpass us, and they will have to solve the problems they face. I don't understand why the UCP doesn't want the same.

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

Cystic Fibrosis Treatment

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to share a letter from a constituent of mine from Provost, Bernadette Lawes.

Dear Mr. Horner,

My grandson Westin is three and a half months old. Two weeks after his birth we were informed that he has cystic fibrosis. CF is a rare, fatal, and progressive genetic disease with no cure. Most people with this face a lifetime of multiple daily medications, respiratory therapies, and numerous hospital visits and often require lung transplants just to survive adolescence.

Westin is a very happy, social little boy and currently only requires enzymes before every feeding to be able to digest breast milk. His lungs are still clear, but soon the mucus in his lungs will start to thicken, and he will require many more medications and therapies just to breathe.

Westin's best chance to stay healthy as long as possible would be to have access to a newly developed drug therapy named Trikafta. Trikafta is currently under review with Health Canada and is being called a game changer for CF patients. Trikafta works to correct the deficiency in the genes that causes CF rather than just the symptoms. It has been shown to make significant improvements in the health of 90 per cent of CF patients. This drug needs to be approved as well as funded by the Alberta government.

No one ever expects to face struggles with their children or grandchildren, but when it does happen, you just pray the treatment will be available. This medication has the potential to completely change the outcomes for CF patients. I am a 53-year-old grandma, and my only wish is that I do not want to outlive my grandchildren. With this medication Westin will have every chance to outlive me. I hope he will not be defined by this disease and that medical advances will allow him to live a long, fulfilling life with very few hospital stays and without a lung transplant.

Please encourage the Premier, Health minister, and whoever will listen to make Trikafta available to the hundreds of Albertans living with CF and champion this important cause.

Jobs Now Program

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you a story, the story of 120 days of the UCP not putting money to work to help unemployed Albertans.

On December 16, 2020, Albertans learned that Ottawa announced \$185 million for this UCP government to use for jobs in Alberta. This money was meant to be spent in fiscal 2020 to build on our existing strong delivery networks, to combat the pandemic-induced job crisis. When asked for specific details about Alberta's plan for this money, the UCP government said only: stay tuned.

Seventy-two days later, on February 25, 2021, the UCP proudly announced that the program now had a name. Alberta jobs now, they were boldly calling it. Unfortunately, after 72 days the only detail the government could provide was that name. No other details were available. When pressed for specifics, this government said only: stay tuned.

One hundred days after the federal announcement, on March 25 of this year, this UCP government asked the members of this Assembly to pass third and final reading of Alberta's 2021 budget. Included in that budget was a commitment by the government to spend \$62 million of federal money by the end of the fiscal year. We in the opposition warned the members that it seemed highly improbable that this government could do in the last four business days of the year what they had not done up till that point, yet the budget was passed. The government, as always, said only: stay tuned.

Today, on April 14, it is now 120 days since the federal government first announced that \$185 million available for an emergency jobs program here in Alberta. The original time frame to use that money has lapsed. This government is hoping Ottawa will give them an extension. The UCP has missed deadline after deadline and still has no details about their missing-in-action jobs now program.

I implore the Premier and the ministers: put this money to work, and help Albertans find jobs. It is your job.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Petrochemicals Incentive Program

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased with the announcement last week that Alberta's government approved the first project grant through the Alberta petrochemicals incentive program. Through this grant of \$408 million spread out over three years, Inter Pipeline is able to invest in their \$4 billion propane to polypropylene plastic facility. This is amazing news for Alberta's Industrial Heartland, located in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. When the facility is under construction, it will employ 16,000 Albertans full-time, with direct and indirect jobs also employing over 300 Albertans permanently after construction.

1:40

I'm very pleased with Alberta's involvement in diversifying our economy through this grant. Projects like this will contribute to Alberta's economic recovery. The Alberta petrochemicals incentive program is a key part of Alberta's recovery plan and the natural gas vision and strategy to turn the province into a top global producer of petrochemicals. This program provides grants to companies to attract investments in new or expanded market-driven petrochemical facilities.

Petrochemical production is essential to everyday living. Their uses include medical supplies, phones, TVs, desks, chairs, product packaging, and the list goes on. The fact is that we can't live in a world without petrochemical production, so why not develop it here

in Alberta? Alberta has everything we need to produce petrochemical products for customers in the province, Canada, and around the world.

There is a future for economic growth in Alberta, and I believe that the petrochemical industry will put us on the right track. The fact is backed up by industry experts such as Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association, which estimates that there is an opportunity to grow the sector by more than \$30 billion by 2030, resulting in tens of thousands of jobs. I am very pleased that Alberta's petrochemical development is taking its first steps here in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

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

Seniors' Issues

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This pandemic has hit seniors the hardest. Throughout the past year I have called on this government to do more to protect them, and they have continually ignored my calls. Over 1,200 residents of continuing care facilities have tragically died due to COVID-19. My heart goes out to every family that has experienced loss.

The COVID crisis has revealed larger problems in how seniors are treated and valued in our province. Stories of residents being neglected in continuing care have been constant throughout the pandemic. Many loved ones of residents reach out to my office and share how residents are not being bathed, are sitting in their own waste, and not being supported in feeding. A core reason for this problem is a staffing shortage, which the UCP has done nothing to address.

Instead, the UCP is more concerned about ways they can privatize continuing care even more, sending out biased surveys suggesting that residents should have to pay for companionship. The UCP also kicked dependants off the seniors' drug plan and wants to increase accommodation fees for continuing care. The UCP has targeted Alberta's pensions, which has created stress for so many seniors regarding their financial future.

Another action the UCP took early on in their mandate was to eliminate the Seniors Advocate and then appoint a political partisan as the Health Advocate. In B.C. the Seniors Advocate is independent and an expert on seniors. She has been making recommendations that have made the government's response better, such as implementing rapid testing. In Alberta I have heard nothing from the UCP's Health Advocate.

The UCP have also ignored continuing calls for a public inquiry into the deaths in continuing care. They claim that they have a report from the first wave to address lessons learned, but as we experience the third wave, that report is nowhere to be seen. Imagine what could have been done. Imagine how many lives could have been saved if this government practised some humility and provided transparency.

Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, it appears that we are not all in this together. Canada contributes less than 2 per cent of global carbon emissions, yet the Trudeau government claims that a price on Canadian carbon is an essential part of a plan to fight global climate change. While Canadian consumers and industry are punished with ever-increasing carbon taxation, the federal government allows products from around the world to enter our borders from countries with little to no carbon policy.

A study published at the Fraser Institute on March 16, 2021, forecasted that the Canadian carbon tax will lead to a 1.8 per cent

decline in GDP and a net loss of 184,000 jobs. This is not a credible plan to address global emissions, yet the Trudeau Liberals remain committed to it. Striving towards a solution with new technology and more efficient energy use and production is a global goal. Countries will need to work together, not on their own, to meet this goal. Instead of Trudeau penalizing Canadian consumers and industry with carbon taxation, our energy and technology sectors can export clean energy, efficient technology, and help heavy-carbon-producing countries reduce their emissions.

It has been said in this House time and again that Canadian energy, Alberta energy is some of the cleanest, most environmentally friendly sourced and exported in the world. Bringing these products to market will boost Canada's economy, creating jobs and capital that will drive innovation while at the same time helping the world to meet their goal. It is time for Canadians to recognize that this is a global issue and that to punish only Canadian consumers and industry with carbon taxes while not implementing the same taxation world-wide is a completely irrelevant and ineffective global emissions strategy. Canadians should say no to these taxes until the entire globe is willing to pay the price; otherwise, this is simply virtue signalling that only punishes Canadians, with no measurable impact on global emissions.

Antiracism and BIPOC History Content in Educational Curriculum

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, the draft K to 6 curriculum is so Eurocentric, I'm concerned that this government did not do enough to do its job to ensure that the history of the BIPOC communities are reflected in it. Alberta has a rich history of its indigenous people, and people of colour have contributed a lot to shape the economic and cultural fabric of this province. People of colour have been here for hundreds of years before the province was created. They have contributed to building this province. Records show people of colour graduating from the University of Alberta as early as in the 1920s. They have helped farm the land here and worked on the railway that connected Canada from coast to coast. They participated in the social movements that took place here and across Canada, fighting for affordable and accessible education, universal health care, and the right to vote. People of colour have helped make this province more progressive.

Instead of celebrating Albertans who are people of colour for contributing to this province, the UCP sows fear and division. This Premier failed to condemn the tiki torch rallies here in Edmonton and only said that some of those people in attendance were there to terrorize racialized Albertans. The UCP failed to act on antiracism work put forward by community leaders, and they attack anyone who calls them out for doing so. Now they are prioritizing white values in the curriculum. They have included language that is sympathetic to the KKK, and they continue to press ahead with this horrible classroom content despite massive opposition. It's time to listen to Albertans. Premier, don't bring your warped world view into Alberta's classrooms.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I was young, the now minister of environment convinced me to give him my dime for his nickel. Of course, looking at the size of his nickel compared to my dime, I saw this as a no-brainer. I've since learned, of course, that bigger doesn't necessarily mean better, as clearly

evidenced. I have now seen the same negotiation take place with my own children in my own home. My older two seem to have a natural grasp of finances, my younger two less so, to the point where I find their money lying around the house. I once found a \$20 bill sitting in a flowerpot by the front window that they had received from their great-oma for their birthday.

Our children's attitudes towards finances begin to develop at a young age. It is important that we help our kids understand value, to learn habits around how they manage money. I have received the same feedback from those who have taken the time to read over the math curriculum in depth. Practical skills, practical applications of math concepts take centre stage, with early exposure to where they would use these skills like financial literacy. I have four kids, four kids in the latter half of the K through 6 experience. I have found myself teaching my frustrated children how I did math before we could progress with their assigned homework. This disconnect is the problem.

Independent studies have shown that our students' math skills were slipping. Since 2007, internationally, our students went from 16th to 39th. Children need to learn the skills that will help them succeed, and it is plain that a change in course is necessary. I've received a lot of feedback about the curriculum, good feedback in that it is constructive on how we can draft this curriculum and how it can be tweaked and improved. I encourage all parents and teachers to dive into all aspects of this curriculum, and I look forward to continuing this conversation with you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time is 1:50.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

School Re-entry Plan

Ms Hoffman: "A thorough search conducted by staff did not yield any responsive records": that's a quote that we received in September from this government as we asked for the correspondence they received about the school re-entry plan, but it turns out that there were pages, hundreds of pages and counting, school board after school board telling this government that they needed proper re-entry support. Why did this Premier try to hide concerns from school boards? It seems it was actually because he had no plan to keep schools safe.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course that's not true. The government has constantly consulted with superintendents, school boards, the chief medical officer, Alberta Health, and others in ensuring safe operation of schools while the NDP has been very busy trying to frighten parents and teachers. The reality is that fewer than 1 per cent of students have been affected by in-school transmission. The Minister of Education has been clear that where numbers warrant and there is a request from the school board, she's prepared to authorize online education, as she may do in some instances. But the focus is keeping students safe.

Ms Hoffman: The Peace Wapiti school division said that their social distancing could not be achieved under the current transportation resources or available classroom space. The Living Waters Catholic school division said that they had "concerns about the ability of school boards to meet the requirements of physical distancing." St. Albert public schools said that their current infrastructure doesn't allow for physical distancing in any of their schools. We proposed finding new space such as empty university

campuses. The Premier mocked us for months, and he did nothing. Couldn't the Premier at least have tried to keep schools safe? We have hundreds of schools on COVID alert, thousands of kids in isolation, and he still does nothing.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, over 700,000 students are benefiting from in-classroom instruction, who would all be stuck at home if the NDP was in office, of whom about 1,500 have been identified as having contracted COVID-19 through in-school transmission, less than a fraction of a per cent. I'll remind the member of what Dr. Hinshaw said in our decision to reopen schools in August of last year. "This plan puts the interests of students and staff first. Educators, administrators, families, health professionals and government all need to work together to support a safe return to in-person classes." We followed Dr. Hinshaw's advice in this respect.

Ms Hoffman: Only days ago this government rolled out their much-overdue plan for rapid testing in schools and expected a medal for doing the bare minimum. This government ignored our call in December for more testing in schools, and they ignored school boards' requests from places like Palliser. Last May the board urged "robust and plentiful COVID-19 testing." Last May; nearly a year ago, Premier. Why did the UCP force parents and staff to wait? Palliser knew what they needed a year ago. Why didn't the government act, why didn't they even try, and why did they continue to hide the evidence until we got it recently?

Mr. Kenney: The opposite is true, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there is a dedicated team of investigators for contact tracing with respect to schools. They have been turning around investigations in 24 hours. It's hard to do it faster than that given the complexity of these investigations. I'll remind the member what the college of Alberta superintendents said, that they appreciate the opportunity to work alongside government to develop a detailed re-entry plan and strongly believe that the re-entry plan offers the appropriate balance of guidance from the chief medical officer and government while providing for the authority and autonomy of individual school divisions to be sure their students, parents, and staff have a successful and safe return.

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

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora just presented clear evidence that the Premier ignored concerns from school boards and kept 600 pages hidden. His answers demonstrate exactly why he can't be trusted to keep students safe at school. Right now 1 out of every 5 schools have an outbreak, 27 in Calgary alone; 1 in 5 active cases today are school-aged children. I will say this louder so that we can get past the Premier's earplugs. We want schools open – wait for it – safely. If the Premier agrees, why did he spend a year resisting calls to do just that?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, isn't it hilarious to hear the NDP backpedalling about this? In the spring they were demanding that we create 2,400 new schools and certify and hire thousands of new teachers. It was only a plan in cloud-cuckoo-land, not in reality. It was a plan to keep the schools shut, because we know what parties of the left everywhere wanted to do all through this, listen to special interests and keep the kids at home, which massively disadvantages the life chances of kids in disadvantaged families. Thank goodness they didn't have the chance to shut down the schools.

Ms Notley: Once again the Premier misrepresents our proposal.

Last week the Premier claimed that there was, quote, little evidence of in-school transmission, but here are the actual facts since

Christmas. In January 17 schools reported in-school transmission; by February there were 77; by March, 185; today, nearly 400. The Premier must realize that kids do get COVID. Some do get sick. Emerging studies show that it can have long-term impacts even without symptoms, and, yes, it does spread inside the school. When will the Premier do more than just telling teachers to tidy up?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what we will not do is to engage in the irresponsible fearmongering of the NDP, which from day one has sought to frighten parents and children. The scientific evidence is absolutely clear that children are at no greater health risk from COVID-19 than for the regular flu and that in-classroom transmission is extremely rare. When it happens, we need to deal with it, as we have, very rapidly and appropriately. I'll remind her of what the president of the Alberta School Boards Association said when we reopened the schools. Quote, we appreciate the various experts, parents, and community members that have helped inform a plan that prioritizes health and . . .

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, ever since the fall this Premier has repeatedly told teenagers that they are low risk, they don't get sick, and that even in cramped classrooms they can't possibly spread the virus. Yesterday he even said that he understands why partying teenagers think they're immune. I do, too: because he told them they are. All of this to justify starving schools of the resources they need to keep our kids safe. Instead of blaming everyone else, why doesn't this Premier step up, do his job, and invest in school safety?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's not this government that plays the blame game. The NDP loves talking about blame and punishment, but I'll quote from an expert. Lorrie Jess, president of the Alberta School Boards Association, says: "We appreciate the various experts, parents, and community members that helped inform a plan that prioritizes the health and safety of students and staff. The ASBA and all school boards will work diligently to implement this plan and look forward to continuing to work with the Minister of Education on it throughout the year to come." Unquote.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition for her third set of questions.

Premier's Remarks on COVID-19

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the divide over the need for health restrictions is growing. The increasing number of rallies, culminating in this week's despicable chants against Dr. Hinshaw, are alarming, but if the Premier is asking how we got here, he needs to look in the mirror. For almost a year he's been characterizing public health measures as a restriction on freedoms and an attack on the economy. Now we hear his own talking points shouted back at him at these very rallies. Does the Premier take any responsibility for his role in encouraging distrust in public health orders?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government has taken a balanced and appropriate approach to keeping Albertans safe from this pandemic while limiting the very real restrictions on freedoms. What I find shocking is the NDP's belief that these extraordinary powers and restrictions do not constitute a limitation of rights and freedoms. They do. We believe, obviously, that they are justifiable, under the Charter in a free and democratic society, to protect lives, but we need to recognize – boy, can you imagine the protests that we would see out front if the NDP was in charge, having locked this province down hard for the past year? Thankfully, we're not in that situation.

Ms Notley: Instead we have the highest per capita cases in the country again.

He called COVID-19 influenza; it's not. He said that it's mostly just the elderly who get seriously ill: wrong again. He said that vulnerable Albertans living on the street have a natural immunity; they don't. He said that it doesn't spread in schools and children don't get sick. That's false. He pits the economy against public health, and he makes promises on reopening that he can't keep. When will the Premier realize that his own inconsistency has polarized the issue and helped stoke opposition to life-saving health measures, even in his own caucus?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the only party in Canada that has polarized the debate so viciously and so consistently is Alberta's NDP. When opposition parties across the country came together to support responsible public health measures, what did the NDP do? They saw from the very beginning an opportunity to divide, to frighten, and to exploit. It is true that the vast majority of people who get sick from this disease are elderly. That's a scientific fact. That's why we're focused on vaccinating them. It is equally true that most people who have antibodies are largely immune from contracting the disease.

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I have one more thing.

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

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that we're all in this together, but there's a glaring double standard. He stayed quiet as MLAs called public health orders virtue signalling and excessive risk aversion. He defended his MLAs vacationing abroad while Albertans stayed home alone at Christmas. Worst of all, he continues to allow 17 of his MLAs to undermine the CMO and the life-saving health orders she's issued. Expecting Albertans to respect the rules when his own caucus won't is a fool's game, and now all Albertans are reaping what he's sown. Why won't he apologize for his incredible failure to lead?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I'm just going to give up trying to explain democracy to the New Democratic Party.

Ms Notley: Before or after you fired the Election Commissioner?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, does the Leader of the Opposition have the floor, or may I proceed?

The Speaker: You're welcome to proceed.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, she has about as much respect for democracy as she does for civility in this Chamber. The reality is that elected representatives have a right and responsibility to represent their constituents, and this government has a responsibility to act to protect Albertans. That's exactly what we've done and will continue to do.

Health Care Workers' Vaccination for COVID-19

Ms Gray: Last summer this Health minister went to war with doctors, and now, during the deadly third wave of this pandemic, he's decided to pick a new fight with front-line health care workers, including nurses. It seems that the minister thinks it's an excellent idea to penalize them for getting vaccinated. In reality he's being

unfair, unreasonable, discriminatory, and, in the process, violating collective agreements. To the Minister of Health: why are you punishing our front-line health care heroes, who are most at risk, for getting vaccinated?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. None of that is true. AHS is working with their employees to make accommodations for people to get their vaccinations. I think that AHS has made their position on this public and very clear. They're going to continue to encourage all health care workers to obtain the vaccines. Before, when there was difficulty and long waits for vaccines to be obtained, there was vacation time that was afforded to those health care workers. That's not the case right now. They're going to continue to make sure that the vaccines are available to those employees and encourage everybody to get the vaccine once available to them.

Ms Gray: The Minister of Health has struck out again.

Now, the minister is responsible. Alberta's nurses, housekeepers, unit clerks, and others are having to use unpaid leave or vacation time to get vaccinated. At a time when we should be doing everything in our power to get our health care heroes vaccinated, this minister's priority is putting up barriers, picking a fight. It is small, petty, and vindictive. Why is this government forcing health care workers to use unpaid time and vacation time to get the vitally important COVID-19 vaccine? How does making vaccination more difficult help end this pandemic?

Mr. Shandro: None of that is true, Mr. Speaker. AHS is going to continue to make sure that the employees are going to be able to get their vaccines, encouraging everybody to get the vaccine when it's their turn, when they're eligible. We're going to continue to make sure that AHS has all the resources that they need to be able to respond to the pandemic because the focus for this government is the health of all Albertans throughout this pandemic.

Ms Gray: A month ago the Official Opposition called for three paid hours off for working Albertans to get vaccinated. We made this proposal to encourage vaccine adoption because we know that widespread vaccination is the single most important factor to keep Albertans safe and get our economy up and running again. It's been a month. We've heard nothing from this government. To the minister. So far your approach to the pandemic has included threats of pink slips, barriers to vaccination, and a seemingly constant desire to insult and ridicule those on the front line of the greatest health care crisis we've ever faced. What is wrong with your government?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what isn't wrong. We're going to continue to make sure that AHS has all the resources that they need, and we are going to make sure that the front-line workers have everything they need to respond to this pandemic. That's what we're going to do. We're going to focus on lives. We're going to focus on livelihoods. The NDP will continue to focus on misrepresenting what's happening in the pandemic. They will continue to misrepresent and undermine confidence in the public and these amazing health care workers on the front line responding to the pandemic. It's unfortunate. I'm not going to hold my breath waiting for the NDP to change this behaviour. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is the only one with the call.

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is without question that skilled trades workers in our province are indispensable to our economy and our society. These workers are the plumbers, mechanics, welders, hairstylists, and many others that help keep our society functioning. As the chair of the skilled trades caucus and a former member of the Skills for Jobs Task Force, I know without doubt that the contributions that these workers make are integral to the success and growth of Alberta's economy. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how have the recommendations of the Skills for Jobs Task Force shaped Bill 67?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Perhaps I can take a moment just to thank the hon. member and the entire skilled trades caucus for their extensive involvement and feedback and engagement in the development of Bill 67 as well as my thanks, acknowledgement, and appreciation to all members of the task force that we convened in 2019. Their final report has acted as the foundation for Bill 67. In fact, within their report the task force recommended a complete rewrite of the almost 30-year-old act governing apprenticeship and skilled trades, and we're taking their expert advice and doing just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that apprenticeship education is centred around on-the-job training and work-integrated learning and given that this type of education has proven to strongly support student learning and success, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what benefits can expanding the apprenticeship style of education to other professions bring to our workforce, and what other professions can we expect this to be applied to?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the member is absolutely correct. The apprenticeship model of education is a very powerful model. Individuals learn by doing, by being on the job, which, of course, is supplemented by academic learning, and we believe that that model can be applied to more areas. You know, yesterday I mentioned that there could be opportunities in business, whether that's in marketing, graphic design, in finance, banking, and other areas as well as information technologies, cybersecurity, coding. We think that these are all candidates; however, should the legislation be passed, we will be launching a multiyear effort to engage more apprenticeships.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that careers in the skilled trades are often not seen as having equal value as those coming from other forms of postsecondary education and given that Alberta's government knows that apprenticeship learning has every bit as much value and merit as academic learning, to the Minister of Advanced Education: how does Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, work to create more parity of esteem for the skilled trades workers and apprentices in Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the legislation does is quite groundbreaking and will help establish Alberta as a leader in this regard. As it stands currently, a

journeyman's certificate has no formal academic recognition, so when an individual completes their apprenticeship and obtains a journeyman's certificate, they can't use that to ladder into other programs, whether it's another diploma program or a bachelor's degree. We will be changing that dynamic and give apprentices and journeymen in the province more opportunities to build their skills for greater success.

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Bilous: Once again the Premier claimed yesterday to adequate pandemic relief supports for small businesses, and once again he's living in a fantasyland, drinking his own Kool-Aid. The Premier claims his supports for small businesses are by far the largest in the country with another \$10,000 added, but that pales in comparison to the supports offered by his best friend in Ontario. Premier Ford is actually stepping up, offering \$40,000 to help small businesses. The Finance minister is an accountant. Surely he can do the arithmetic. Will the minister help the Premier out, ground him in reality, and show him the math of his woefully inadequate business supports?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier was absolutely correct yesterday. What the member opposite is not including is the support that we provided through the Workers' Compensation Board premium abatement. What the member is not including is the support to the commercial rent assistance program, the tourism levy abatement, and on and on. Alberta has supported small businesses to a greater extent than any other province.

2:10

Mr. Bilous: And it's still not enough.

Given that small businesses are hanging on by a thread because of this Premier's failure to manage the pandemic and given that small businesses are saying that the latest round of emergency supports are not enough and given that the Premier's new closures of small businesses will hit restaurants particularly hard, with bills running up on spoiled inventory, rent, utilities, and insurance with no revenue to pay for it at all, to the Finance minister. Albertans have said loud and clear that your government's program didn't do enough. Will the government go back to the drawing board, throw small businesses a lifeline, and up the payments to help them survive? If not . . .

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the hardship that so many small business owners have experienced during this last year. We recognize that the latest restrictions have created additional hardship. That is why the Premier and the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation announced another round of the small business relaunch grant yesterday, which will provide a further \$10,000 for businesses that are severely impacted by the latest restrictions.

Mr. Bilous: Given that one of this government's biggest failures during the pandemic is that they just won't listen and given that the core operating manual of this government is that only the Premier knows best, not medical experts and certainly not business leaders, and given that this has led to the mismanagement of this pandemic with fully three quarters of Albertans saying that the Premier is

doing a bad job, will the Minister of Finance listen to small business leaders and up these supports for businesses, or is the government's goal here just to look like they're supporting small businesses while actually doing nothing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are listening to small businesses and absolutely acknowledge the hardship that many are facing. Again, that is why we just recently announced another round of the small business relaunch grant. But we are also positioning Alberta's economy for disproportionate recovery and growth. There's nothing better that a government can focus on right now than ensuring that we're positioning the province for economic recovery.

Indigenous Content in Educational Curriculum

Mr. Feehan: The Premier can claim all he wants that his curriculum is receiving widespread endorsements, but all I'm seeing is failing grades being handed down right across this province. The two biggest school boards and about a dozen others have all said no. Yesterday the Northlands school division rejected the contents, saying, "The Indigenous perspectives and experiences that were included in the previous curriculum seem to be omitted." Minister, Northlands has a significant indigenous student enrolment. The NDP worked hard to improve learning and attendance there. Why is this government ruining all of that work and removing indigenous content from the curriculum?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday, we are pleased that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit content will still be taught in every single grade in the K to 6 curriculum. This was an important commitment that we 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 the treaties. We do encourage all feedback from parents, from educators, from the opposition, and from school boards as this is a draft, and we will be taking feedback over the next year.

Mr. Feehan: Given that Northlands was far from alone in rejecting this Premier's bogus curriculum yesterday and given that the Bearspaw, Chiniki, Tsuut'ina, and Wesley First Nations also said that it cannot endorse the curriculum because it has, quote, a glaring exclusion of the local Alberta First Nations history and stories, to the minister. Indigenous people across Alberta have rejected this government's curriculum. They've given it a failing grade. How did this government get it so wrong? Don't they see the damage that they're doing?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we had over a hundred teachers, educators from across the province take part in the development of this curriculum as well as subject matter experts. I do want to once again 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. I will quote once again for the member opposite:

... 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 ...

Mr. Feehan: Given that the list of boards and groups rejecting this curriculum includes Treaty 6, Northlands, Tsuut'ina, Wesley, Bearspaw, Chiniki, the Calgary board of education, Edmonton public schools, Rockyview schools, Battle River, both Medicine Hat boards, St. Albert, and many, many more each day and given that 91 per cent of teachers don't support the curriculum and 95 per cent of principals don't support the curriculum, will this government step up, admit they've failed their students with the curriculum they put forward, get back to the drawing board, and actually consult indigenous Albertans? Come on.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that my colleague the Minister of Indigenous Relations has been reaching out and speaking to indigenous communities concerning the curriculum for the last number of weeks. He has spoken with several chiefs about the curriculum, has had very positive conversations, and has heard some positive feedback on the content surrounding residential schools and ensuring that treaties are included. My colleague also assured them that this is a draft curriculum and that they are able to provide feedback. Again, this feedback is open to indigenous communities, Métis people, and all Albertans, and we urge people to get involved.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North.

Alberta Parole Board

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In pursuance of a fair deal for Alberta the Alberta government established the Fair Deal Panel to undertake consultations and make recommendations to the Alberta government. One of the recommendations was to create the Alberta provincial parole board. The board came into effect on February 1, 2021, and serves Albertans. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: can you please explain the role of Alberta's parole board and how it is different from Canada's parole board?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud to say that we are now the third province with a provincial parole board. What works for Ottawa does not work always for Alberta, so, like Quebec and Ontario, the goal of the Alberta Parole Board is to have members who understand the needs of our Alberta communities making decisions on behalf of their fellow citizens. The members of the Alberta Parole Board have an incredible wealth of lived experience, knowledge that reflects the diversity of our province, and I have no doubt that they will serve Albertans well in this role.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Albertans want a fairer, faster, and more responsive justice system and further given that the board aims to ensure that parole decisions reflect crime trends and local priorities to better protect our communities, to the same minister: when can Albertans expect to see the impact the provincial parole board has on crime reduction and how that will impact Alberta centres like Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The revolving door of our justice system is just not doing good for anyone. When we see the repeat offenders and when they come through the courts, oftentimes these repeat offenders are well known within their communities, and they victimize. What I would say to Albertans is that the Alberta Parole Board started to hear cases in February, and we're starting to hear some very, very good feedback from that. The goal is to reduce crime rates in all parts of our beautiful province. Regardless of where they live, they deserve to feel safe and secure in their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta continues to fight for a fair deal and that the Alberta Parole Board is one way to accomplish that and given that some do not see the clear value in having our own provincial parole board, that is not controlled by Ottawa, and further given that the federal government has repeatedly ignored Alberta's request for a fair deal in Canada, to the same minister: can you please tell us why the Alberta Parole Board is in the best interests of Albertans?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you again to the member for the question. It's a basic tenet of our democracy, Mr. Speaker, that local decisions be made by local government. The Parole Board of Canada is run by federal officials in Ottawa, and the decisions are made on what's in Canada's best interests and not in Alberta's. The Alberta Parole Board is by Albertans, for Albertans. I just wanted to remind all of the members that the Alberta Parole Board only hears applications for those serving fewer than two years. However, I'm confident that the members of the Parole Board are aware of the concerns of Albertans with respect to crime and their communities and that those . . .

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

Coal Development Policies

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the majority of Albertans achieved a small victory when a bill from the opposition leader to protect our mountains and headwaters from open-pit coal mining was approved to proceed to the House for debate. One problem: the session will likely rise before a final vote on defending the mountains is ever recorded. To the Minister of Energy: should debate on the Eastern Slopes Protection Act not occur before the House rises, will the government take this up as government legislation so that all Albertans can go back to our 45-year history of protecting category 1 and 2 lands from coal strip-mining?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't comment on what may or may not happen and come before the Legislature on a future date, but what I can comment on is the fact that we have a coal committee, a coal committee comprised of very accomplished Albertans that are going out to take consultation over the next six months. The coal committee is made up of respected Albertans that will come back on November 15 with a coal policy for the government. So on this, it'll be taking input from all Albertans, including the NDP if they choose.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that the minister's so-called consultation about whether we should blow the tops off mountains consists of a vague survey and a panel whose activities are so far unknown and given that the minister has so far rejected calls by Albertans to host

town halls herself so she can hear directly from the people of Lethbridge, indigenous people, ranchers, and the majority of Albertans about what they really think, to the minister: will she hold town halls open to all Albertans, will she attend, and when can we expect, precisely, this to happen?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, prior to reinstating the 1976 coal policy and since reinstating it fully, by the way, I've spoken to many Albertans, including municipal leaders, indigenous leaders, all the chiefs. So we're prepared to listen. Right now the Coal Policy Committee is developing an engagement plan, by the Coal Policy Committee being informed by engagement with Alberta with the survey that's out, and we will follow whatever recommendations they have for engagement.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that this minister's plan is to blow the tops off mountains that were protected by an open-pit mining ban for 45 years – that's eight Premiers – and given that if my inbox is any indication, the minister is hearing from Albertans – she's just not listening – and given that the UCP has tried to hide this plan but that only these guys would think no one would notice if they blow the top off the Livingstone Range, will the minister or any caucus member attend our next virtual town hall on this issue? Will they do it? Will this minister be brave enough?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones. On March 13, 2018, the Member for Lethbridge-West, who's just asked me a question, stood before the House in this very room and said, "Of course, Alberta does have a number of metallurgical coal interests and will continue to develop those [coal mines]." That happened in this Chamber on March 13, 2018. Those coal mines are in the eastern slopes, the very places they're talking about right now.

Provincial Policing

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, of all the bad ideas put forward by the UCP, getting rid of the RCMP is among the worst. The government's own Fair Deal Panel report concludes that the same would cost Albertans hundreds of millions of dollars, with not a single new officer to show for it. In short, it's a bad deal. Alberta municipal leaders know this, which is why nearly 80 per cent voted in favour of keeping the RCMP in a recent survey. Will the Minister of Justice recognize a provincial police force as both unnecessary and expensive and take this proposal off the table?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much for the question. What we noticed – and I want to thank all of the people right across Alberta that came out and answered very, very great questions on the panel, and thank you to the MLAs who ran those panels for the fair deal. We are looking to make sure that policing in this province is done for Albertans and by Albertans. It's absolutely imperative that we listen to Albertans and bring it forward and do the proper consultation in order to make sure that that is the correct way to go. I think that the words that are being put out by the NDP right now are divisive and completely inappropriate, especially when the consultations are under way.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the UCP government already announced that it was changing the police funding model for rural communities, to

make them pay an extra \$174 million in policing costs, and given that the UCP government has taken a bigger cut of fine revenues from the municipalities, forcing cuts to policing, and given that the UCP government also cut MSI funding by another \$648 million, putting more pressure on communities to cut services, will the Minister of Justice do municipalities a favour, protect front-line police officers, and take this bad deal off the table once and for all?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I think that on behalf of everybody in this Legislature we'd like to thank our police for the work that they do. They put their lives on the line every single day.

No decisions have been made around provincial policing, but there are a lot of very, very legitimate concerns that are worth hearing. I'm sure that the NDP have also gotten their fair share of information across the tables about policing and what that should look like. Right now the transition study is under way, and it is sitting with PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the UCP continues to download costs, millions of dollars, on to the municipalities struggling with COVID-19 and given that these municipalities cannot run deficits, forcing them to either cut policing costs or raise taxes on Albertans, and given that the AUMA will be debating a resolution to allow municipalities to pass a special tax bylaw to pay for policing services, does the Minister of Justice support higher taxes to pay for police, or does the minister support cuts to police? It's one or the other, but the UCP is choosing both.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, I'm curious as to why the NDP has not called out this MLA and the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, who stood up at an antiracism function that we were at together standing on behalf of black Muslim women wearing hijabs, standing up for them, not 15 metres away from where they were standing. Instead of standing with signs saying that we stand with black Muslim women, guess what they did? They decided to tell mistruths about funding antiracism and then flipped a sign over that said, "Let's support black Muslim women" and wrote on the back divisive politics about how the government should do better. They should be fired.

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

Multiculturalism and Antiracism Initiatives

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is an inclusive and diverse community, and my riding of Calgary-Currie is no exception. Alberta has always been a magnet for ambitious entrepreneurs from every background and culture to move here and make Alberta their home. Our government is committed to making sure they can maximize their potential and contribute as much as possible towards job creation, economic growth, and the community. To the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women: what is your ministry doing to continue to engage with Alberta's diverse cultural groups?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. Thank you so much for the very important question. I'm very proud of the work that's being done and the consultations that have been done with the organizations. I

also want to say Ramadan Mubarak, also happy Ugadi, and also happy Vaisakhi. We have a confluence of many, many wonderful cultural events and faith events that are going on in our province right now. Our ministry has just been so honoured to connect with thousands of Albertans of diverse cultural groups in person and through virtual celebrations. In fact, we had one of the most robust Black History Months in the history of the province . . .

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that there have been numerous grants launched by your ministry, notably the multiculturalism, indigenous, and inclusion grant program, and given that this grant program fosters cultural awareness in communities across the province as well as an appreciation and celebration of indigenous peoples and further given that our government is dedicated to supporting all cultural communities, to the same minister: what other grants and programs has your ministry put forward to support cultural communities here in Alberta?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much for the question. Contrary to what you will hear from the opposition over and over again, our ministry has invested \$4.1 million into supporting the status of women and multiculturalism in Alberta. The grants that you are talking about are incredibly important as they action support to projects that promote crosscultural understanding, celebrating diverse backgrounds, and helping with understanding, especially with the impacts of discrimination, closely related to what I had said earlier. The next deadline for applications will be on September 1, and we really look forward to seeing some of the amazing opportunities . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government is committed to combatting racism and given that being a victim of racism is a lived reality for far too many Albertans in our province, we have the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, or the AARAC. It is made up of 24 members from across the province who represent our ethnic and religious diversity. Can the minister tell this House more about the work that the AARAC is doing and the role they play in representing Alberta's diverse array of cultural groups?

2:30

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much for the question. The antiracism council has been an absolute joy to work with. Our two new co-chairs, that have been appointed, have been with us every step of the way at so many of the events that we've been attending. I have to tell you that it's been quite – we just came through Yom ha-Shoah, which is the remembrance of the Holocaust. I had the opportunity to speak with Abe Silverman, a survivor of the Holocaust, who was so generous in sharing his information about the horrific things that have happened during the Holocaust. These lived experiences and the things that we go through are absolutely imperative in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Thank you to the hon. minister.

I encourage members that if they would like to have conversations, perhaps they can do that in their respective lounges.

Child Intervention Services

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to ensuring the safety and well-being of children in care, the work of the office of the

Child and Youth Advocate and his recommendations are vital. They hold the government accountable because the devastating reality is that every year former and current children in care die. That's why I was so dismayed to see his most recent report into deaths of children in care: 10 reviews, seven addressing issues previously highlighted yet with no action by this government, including a recommendation for whole family residential treatment plans, which was refused. To the Minister of Children's Services. The recommendations by the advocate are about saving lives. How do you justify refusing action on his recommendations?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, children deserve to be safe and supported, and the death of any child who is or has been in care is a tragedy. That is why we have worked to work very closely and build a strong relationship with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. I very much appreciate the work that he and his office do to review every single death or serious incident, in some cases, of children in care to see what we can do better and how we can prevent similar situations from happening in the future. If changes are needed, as always we will make them.

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that the minister refused a recommendation from the advocate and given that the Government House Leader and the Minister of Transportation were part of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention under the former NDP government and given that the recommendation by the advocate, refused by the UCP, lines up with three of that panel's recommendations around increasing trauma-informed supports and services and treatment for children and families, two that were due last year, and given that there have been no updates by the minister on the implementation of the action plan – yet she's firmly committed to reducing red tape – to the same minister: how much regulatory burden does she need to reduce to refocus on the work of saving lives?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, when we're talking specifically about family treatment, the reason why that specific recommendation was not accepted is because, in fact, that's something that the ministry is already doing. As I have shared with the member opposite, child intervention is not something that I will politicize in this House. We need to come together. We need to look at recommendations by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and we need to come together to do better for kids and families in need in our province.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the minister has also failed to provide updates on the five-year provincial action plan for youth suicide prevention and given that, sadly, the advocate notes that he has received notifications of 15 young people who have died by suicide since that action plan was released and has recommended that the ministry hold a forum with stakeholders to highlight actions taken, results achieved and to set targets for youth suicide prevention and given that this is about saving the lives of young people, to the same minister: will she commit today to bring together stakeholders to take action on youth suicide and update the public and this Assembly on her results?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about issues like opioid use or suicide and child intervention, this is something that we take very seriously. I actually proactively reached out to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to get his thoughts and made sure that he knows that my door is always open to hear his feedback as well as lived experience from children that have been through the child

intervention system and any other stakeholders that have feedback or ideas of what we can do better going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Rural Veterinarians

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a provincial veterinarian shortage, and it is significantly worse in rural Alberta. This has been a problem for some time, but now we're in crisis. There needs to be mixed professional vets in rural communities to support the agricultural industry. The president of the veterinary association recently said that there is zero – and I quote – growth in the profession. To the minister of agriculture: what is being done to address this crisis of a shortage? Producers need vets to ensure their livestock is healthy.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, there's a grant from Labour and Immigration that's going towards the Alberta vet medical association. Also, the Alberta vet technologists' association is actually going to be conducting a market survey of (a) why there is such a shortage of our rural vets in Alberta and come up with solutions for how we can actually overcome that. It is something that – we appreciate the work that the vet associations are doing in conjunction with the government, and we await the results of that study of how we can actually address this and improve access to vets for our ranchers across the province.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I'm glad to be part of an NDP government that invested in increasing spaces in the University of Calgary for vet students – however, it is clear that more needs to be done to address the shortage – but given that the UCP government is not concerned about brain drain at all as they continue to cut funding to universities and allow tuition to skyrocket, what is the Minister of Advanced Education doing to invest in veterinary students in Alberta, ensure that graduates will practise in Alberta? Please be specific, Minister. Albertans really hope that this government is aware of this serious issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's something that – vets are so important to our ranching industry and to our livestock producers across the province. That's why this government is actually committing \$2.35 million to the University of Calgary to help with their vet programming there, because, again, we have to be able to train and encourage young people to get into the vet profession so that, not just for small animals but large animals as well, we can have more vets and just a stronger, more competitive livestock sector in this province.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that disease in a herd of cattle can substantially damage a farm's profit and hinder the entire supply chain, ensuring that agriculture industries have access to veterinary services is of the utmost importance, and given that agriculture is foundational in the economic recovery and that therefore an adequate supply and access to veterinary services is also foundational to economic recovery, what will the minister of

agriculture commit to today, immediately, in working with his colleagues to increase the supply of rural veterinarians?

Mr. Dreeshen: Yes. The minister is working with the Minister of Advanced Education, working with Minister of Labour and Immigration, working with even the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, to work with the vet association so we can address this critical issue, which is a shortage of rural vets, to actually help out our livestock industry because, again, they have to have access to vets to make sure that herds and flocks in this province are actually being protected and that they can compete internationally. [interjections]

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

Mr. Hanson: Hilarious.

Road and Bridge Construction Projects

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2021-24 capital plan laid out in Budget 2021 has set aside \$2.4 billion specifically for road and bridge construction projects across the province. Given that the capital plan highlights highway rehabilitation projects and highway twinning, widening, and expansion as areas for investment, to the Minister of Transportation: what can Albertans expect from the Alberta government's capital investment in roads and bridges, and how will these projects directly benefit our rural and remote communities?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our capital investment in rural Alberta will create jobs when they're needed most, spurring economic growth and recovery. As the member said, \$2.4 billion will be spent to build or expand roads and bridges across our province, like building a new bridge to replace the aging Tompkins Landing ferry, twinning highway 19, completing the Peace River bridge project, twinning highway 40 south of Grande Prairie, and widening between Grande Cache and Hinton. These investments in both urban and rural Alberta will support our oil and gas, agriculture, manufacturing, and forestry industries and improve safety.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to point out that the NDP was the one that cut the funding to the Saskatchewan veterinary school. [interjections]

Given that northern Alberta is home to many vital transportation corridors for our forestry, energy, and other industrial traffic and given that highway 28 in my riding has been a constant topic of discussion for years due to its poor road quality and safety concerns, to the Minister of Transportation: can you provide this House an update on highway 28 and any up-and-coming projects that might affect it?

Thank you.

The Speaker: I think that the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul will recognize that that is a perfect example of the way a preamble can create disorder inside the Assembly.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, making sure every Albertan can get home safely every day is a top priority for the Minister of Transportation, and \$1.5 billion in additional stimulus funding will allow us to catch up on the necessary work on fixing potholes in Alberta's roads and

bridges. On highway 28 our government will be repaving 14 kilometres of road and improve multiple key intersections near Bonnyville and Fort Kent.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize for my intent of causing disruption.

Given that many northern Alberta secondary highways often become detour routes during road closures or large collisions on primary highways and given that many of these highways pass through rural communities, farmlands, and heavily forested areas that rely on veterinarians and also given that these highways are two-way roads that easily become blocked with poor weather, construction, or equipment moves, to the Minister of Transportation: what is being done to ensure the safety of road quality of all highways in rural and remote areas of the province?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Budget 2021 we focused on fixing and upgrading our existing roads and bridges. Our government's investment in capital maintenance and renewal will improve and repair key roads, highways, and bridges in our province and allow Albertans to travel safely and efficiently across our province. We've already begun work on repaving large sections of busy trade routes such as highways 63 and 881 as well bridge replacements at Prairie Creek and the Hangingstone River.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a piece, Alberta Health Quietly Updated Expenses Policy after [the safe consumption site] Panel Exceeded Travel, Meal Budget by \$10K.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have many, many e-mails, but today I'm just going to table 88 of them about the curriculum. They were sent to the MLAs for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, Chestermere-Strathmore, West Yellowhead, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Morinville-St. Albert, Calgary-Currie, Peace River, Calgary-Klein, and Sherwood Park. Their constituents are incredibly upset about the curriculum and want their complaints and critique put on the record.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I actually have three tablings today, and I have the requisite copies for each. The first one is called Hate Won't Stop Me from Taking Up Space in My City: No One Should Need to Hide Indoors to Be Safe, of course, an article regarding the black Muslim women that were attacked here in the city of Edmonton.

Last night during debate I was making comments regarding the effects of colonialism, and I have another article here called 8 Key Issues for Indigenous Peoples in Canada, which highlighted all the key issues that I was naming in debate last night.

Then the last one is actually an article by a good friend of mine – her name is Brandi Morin – on indigenous activists, and she put a lot of work into this one. It's called The Indigenous People Killed by Canada's Police: The Stories of Indigenous People Who Died in Police Encounters in Canada and the Loved Ones They Left Behind.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 65 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 65, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.

Bill 65 continues our ongoing work to strengthen and modernize Alberta's health legislation. You'll remember that this is the third bill that is known as the Health Statutes Amendment Act. There were two in 2020, Bill 30 and Bill 46. Well, this is the third step in this process, this time with updates and amendments to six pieces of legislation.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

There are amendments to the Health Professions Act, the Pharmacy and Drug Act, the Alberta Evidence Act, and the Crown's Right of Recovery Act as well as minor housekeeping amendments to the Mental Health Act and the Health Facilities Act.

Now, these proposed amendments will help ensure that Alberta's health system better protects, better serves, and better meets the needs of Albertans. The proposed changes support transparency and continuous improvement of the health system. They focus on areas that would increase system efficiencies and ensure that the health system can better adapt and respond to changing needs.

The proposed changes are also a result of how we are working closely with our valued stakeholders. For example, Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments to the Health Professions Act and the Pharmacy and Drug Act were initiated by the pharmacy profession and the pharmacy system here in Alberta. The Alberta College of Pharmacy identified a number of updates that are long overdue. The proposed pharmacy-related amendments will provide Albertans with an enhanced pharmacy system, a system that is more accountable, more modern, and continues to operate safely. This would be achieved by increasing pharmacy owner compliance with legislative, regulatory, and licensing requirements while being more responsive to changing patient needs. The amendments would ensure that all pharmacy owners, regardless of the different ownership models that we have in Alberta, are more accountable for the care provided in their pharmacy.

Now, the current legislation clearly addresses the accountability of pharmacies owned by a sole licensed pharmacist or individual owner, but the accountability of pharmacies owned by corporations or associations, trusts, or some other type of ownership model is less clear. So our amendments would ensure that it's clear that all forms of pharmacy ownership are accountable for the care that's provided in their pharmacy.

We would also add references to pharmacy technicians working in the pharmacy system to ensure that their accountability to Albertans is there as well.

We're also proposing that certain operational requirements for pharmacies are moved from regulations to standards of practice, or what we call SOPs. This would reduce red tape for the Alberta College of Pharmacy to allow the pharmacy system to be more nimble, to be more responsive, to be more adaptive in the future, and this is necessary for Alberta's modern pharmacy system, where pharmacists offer a range of patient services on top of dispensing medications. The college will be able to make changes directly to standards of practice, the SOPs I mentioned, rather than seek changes through the government on pieces of legislation and regulations.

Now, proposed amendments will outline requirements for physical facilities, pharmacy areas, and dispensing areas in standards of practice rather than the regs. This could include setting requirements for the size of dispensing areas, for instance, or the private consultation rooms. Proposed changes will also outline requirements for pharmacy information systems and records handling in standards of practice to enable pharmacies to better manage and safeguard patient records. Further changes will outline the requirements for the safe storage of drugs and the adequate supply of drugs kept in a pharmacy in standards of practice rather than the regulations.

The Alberta College of Pharmacy must develop these standards of practice, which would continue to be overseen by the government and the Ministry of Health.

On top of that, the proposed amendments would enable pharmacists and the pharmacy technicians to continue to provide pharmacy services for animal health, for both companion animals and for herd animals on farms. This will provide farmers and the cattle industry and people in rural communities who raise or own animals with additional options for accessing pharmacy services for those animals.

Now, many communities don't have enough veterinarians, so allowing pharmacies to work with vets and to dispense medications and drugs prescribed by vets will improve access to animal health services. These services, initially for companion animals such as family dogs or cats, were previously authorized in legislation. However, when governance of the profession was transferred from the Pharmaceutical Profession Act to the Health Professions Act, this legal authorization was not included.

2:50

Additionally, in 2018 the federal government made changes to the Food and Drugs Act, and that made it necessary for the Alberta government to update the Health Professions Act to ensure that pharmacists have that explicit authority to provide pharmacy services for animals. The proposed changes to the Health Professions Act will clarify that it is still intended for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to provide pharmacy services to support animal health as they have in the past and provide them with the expanded legal authority to do so for all animals, including cattle and herds as well as the companion or family animals. This is just the first step as amendments to the related pharmacists and pharmacy technicians profession regulation would still be required to identify the specific types of pharmacy services that could be provided to animals.

Now, this bill also proposes amendments to what we call the Alberta Evidence Act to ensure that judges of fatality inquiries in the province have facts and the recommendations from what we call quality assurance committees to help with the fatality inquiries that they oversee. Now, right now the quality assurance committees hold reviews of an adverse event or an unexpected death in a health

care setting to identify errors, then make recommendations or changes to prevent similar events or deaths from happening again.

These committees and the reviews are internal, and they don't assign blame to an individual, but they look for the root causes of an error, usually the result of multiple contributing factors. The internal discussions are currently protected from being used as evidence in legal proceedings to ensure that physicians, nurses, and other medical professionals and staff feel free to provide the information about the incidents and their colleagues. We support that, and we value that important work of the quality assurance committees to facilitate frank and protected discussions.

Currently here in Alberta no information from these reviews is being shared with judges who are overseeing the public fatality inquiries. But judges from two fatality inquiries in Alberta in 2001 – and, yes, Mr. Speaker, this is a difficulty that goes back as far as 2001 – as well as a second fatality inquiry in 2017: those two judges recommended that the province review a section of the Alberta Evidence Act to permit public fatality inquiries to have access to quality assurance records and their recommendations. As a direct response to the request of those judges, our proposed amendments would mean that the quality assurance committees would share select facts and recommendations. This will support fatality inquiries to have more comprehensive reviews and discussions and to provide more effective recommendations.

We have heard from stakeholders such as Alberta Health Services, the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner that health care providers must be protected, and we agree. None of the information provided to fatality inquiries will identify any individual health professional, nor, I should make it clear, Mr. Speaker, would personal opinions or protected discussions be shared. We don't want staff, we don't want colleagues to stop participating in such reviews for fear of such repercussions.

As part of the proposed amendments, fatality inquiries would have access to logistical, factual information about a quality assurance committee such as terms of reference and meeting dates, information that was already disclosed to the patient's family or a personal representative, facts relating to the incident being investigated, recommendations made by the quality assurance committee, and then, last, any steps that the facility operator has taken or will take to avoid or reduce the risk of a similar incident occurring in the future. This should provide families with comfort and reassurance that the public fatality inquiries have the facts to help them conduct strong and efficient reviews. This should also provide organizations that have quality assurance committees with the assurance that the privacy of health professionals who participate in internal reviews and their deliberations would be protected.

We're also proposing amendments to the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. Now, this act provides government with the right to recover its costs of providing health services to people who are injured due to someone else's negligence; for instance, from a fall on an icy sidewalk, a dog bite, an assault, a motor vehicle accident. The government does attempt to recover costs from insurance companies directly, but when no settlement can be reached, the case may proceed to litigation, and sometimes the government joins the lawsuits launched by an injured Albertan to try to recover its cost of providing them with health services. In situations where the claimants lose those cases, the government is currently at risk of having to pay significant court and legal costs even though the government's involvement in these types of lawsuits is typically minimal.

Our proposed amendments would limit government's cost exposure in these cases to a reasonable amount that is directly related to its right to recover the health care costs. For example, this could include costs of trial time that took place in relation to the government's claim. This change would ensure that Alberta taxpayers are not at risk of being on the hook for the full costs associated with an injured person's unsuccessful lawsuit. Other provinces have taken a similar approach to protect their governments and their taxpayers from this risk of cost exposure because it's the prudent thing to do.

These proposed amendments would also help ease conflicts of interest that are faced by lawyers who represent both the province and the injured claimant in these cases. For efficiency and cost-effectiveness the Crown typically retains the same counsel as the injured claimant. Currently, if the court case is unsuccessful and costs are sought by the opposing party, the lawyer is in a difficult position of trying to divvy up the costs between the injured claimants and the government, which have competing interests. By limiting the government's cost exposure overall, lawyers won't have to deal with competing cost interests.

Other proposed amendments in this bill are to the Crown's Right of Recovery Act, to reduce red tape and administrative burden for auto insurers in extraordinary circumstances. Each year the government estimates how much it costs to provide health services to people who are injured in automobile accidents. The government then calculates how much each auto insurance company has to pay each year, using their premium data and reports that the companies must also file annually. Now, amendments to this piece of legislation recognize that in extraordinary circumstances auto insurance companies may not be able to meet the deadlines set for filing the reports or to pay their portion of the health care costs for people who are injured in collisions.

For example, Mr. Speaker, natural disasters such as floods or fires can destroy insurance records, and in such circumstances our amendments would authorize Treasury Board and Finance to take a look at the situation and decide for themselves whether or not to waive the penalties for an auto insurer who can't meet the deadlines to file reports and pay their share of the health care costs. These amendments will simplify the process of obtaining administrative relief when an insurer demonstrates that they were unable to meet the filing and the payment deadline due to circumstances that were beyond their control. This type of provision, making a penalty discretionary rather than mandatory, is common in revenue legislation in Alberta, as it is in other provinces as well.

In the absence of a waiver, an insurer seeking relief would have to go through the onerous process of applying right now to Treasury Board for remission, causing red tape for not just the insurer but, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the government as well. [A cellphone rang] And . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. However, I don't think that the decision that I've come to is actually in any way, shape, or form being viewed as bad by anybody in the House. Obviously, there's the opportunity here for a small donation to a charity just with regard to the interruption of the hon. minister. No apology is necessary or anything like that.

Please, if you could continue.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, in the absence of that waiver provision, making it discretionary rather than mandatory, it causes red tape for government, not just for the insurer.

Other proposed amendments in this bill, as I said, are to the Health Facilities Act and the Mental Health Act.

3:00

Now, these are largely housekeeping in nature to remove outdated references or repeal unproclaimed sections. For instance, the Mental Health Act was amended, as you know, Mr. Speaker, in 2020 to ensure the continued protection of the rights of Albertans and to protect public safety. The majority of the changes to the Mental Health Act came into force this past September and support more timely, patient-focused care while enabling families to support and care for their loved ones in a more significant way, and the proposed minor amendments in Bill 65 further support these changes by ensuring that the act is as clear and as consistent as possible.

Together all these proposed amendments continue government's work, as I said, Mr. Speaker, to strengthen, to modernize our province's health legislation. Taking these steps will provide Albertans with a more responsive health system, which evolves to meet the changing patient needs and continues to operate in a safe and accountable fashion.

I ask for support for second reading of Bill 65, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen, with 20 minutes.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I address this bill, Bill 65, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, I think it's important that we frame it inside of what's been happening with this government up to date. It's important that we recognize that we're going through this global health pandemic and, in so doing, rather than work with the majority of the workers in the health professions, we're in fact picking fights with a lot of them. We're fighting with doctors. We're having devastating effects on rural health care. There is, of course, the firing of 11,000 health care workers and all this.

I think that Albertans see what's going on when this government brings these pieces of legislation forward, Mr. Speaker, because I see it all the time on commentary on social media, not only there but in e-mails that I receive at my office as well as even discussions that I happen to have when running into people at the supermarket, and that is that it's undeniable – people see right through it – that this government is trying to bring in American-style health care here in the province of Alberta, all this while Albertans are facing a jobs emergency, a dangerous third wave of the COVID pandemic, yet this UCP government is bringing forward this omnibus health care legislation and inserting into it this whole giveaway to the automobile insurance industry, providing a freebie to these insurance companies.

I remember when the pandemic first started – this was back in March, April – getting up in this House and sharing with all the members of this Legislature that there were individuals that were getting in contact with me and saying: hey, is there anything that we can do about the skyrocketing prices of automobile insurance? I mean, at that time a lot of people were staying at home – many continue to do so, of course – and they weren't using their vehicles as much. They were basically just sitting in their garages or wherever it happened that they parked their vehicle. They weren't going out and about in their cars as they normally do. You'd think that the automobile insurance companies would actually give Albertans a break at this very difficult time.

Of course, we've discussed this whole issue of the jobs crisis and the fact that we're going through this incredibly tough time, the economic crisis, which has just been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. A number of people have been laid off from their jobs,

yet here is the government providing the automobile insurance company with a freebie. For me that just states unequivocally that this government is not on the side of Albertans and those who value our public health care system.

There are a number of issues that come to mind when we actually go through this particular bill, and those are that this government eliminated late filing penalties for auto insurers and that fines are at the discretion of the minister. The government says that they'll only be waived in extraordinary circumstances. Why not define extraordinary circumstances in this piece of legislation? Why give this huge new authority to the Finance minister?

Of course, this comes along with many other pieces of legislation that continue to do the same, give more authority to the minister. I was saying it last night in debate, and you've heard me say it several times. It's something that I highly question and that I try to bring to my constituents on an ongoing basis so that they're aware of what's actually happening within these pieces of legislation as they're presented by this government inside of this House.

Another question that we have would be: how will consumers benefit from waiving late filing penalties for auto insurers? Why remove incentives for companies to provide this critical data to the government?

With respect to fatality inquiries and this supplemental information provided, does this amendment align exactly with the judicial recommendations? That's another important question. Can the government table these recommendations in the Assembly so that members can review them to ensure alignment with this legislation?

These are but some of the questions that we have when it comes to this particular bill and the changes that are specifically being made at this particular time. I think that Albertans are asking themselves – well, when they come across this piece of legislation, they'll be asking themselves these same questions.

At the end of the day, this is about how it impacts Albertans and their own pockets, specifically now at a time that Albertans are feeling it the worst. We've seen a number of pieces of legislation where basically Albertans are going to have to dig deeper and deeper into their own pockets and have to pay for services that beforehand essentially were being covered by the taxes that were already being paid. Albertans are going to have to continue to pay the same amount of tax that they were paying before, but now, on top of that, they're going to have to be paying these user fees, more money coming out of their pockets. Yet this government, people from this caucus, have the audacity to say that they're making life better for Albertans. I'd love to hear one of them get up and justify this.

Albertans are having to pay the same amount in taxes as they were before, yet now they're having to pay more and more user fees when it comes to accessing services provided by the government like – you name it – going camping. They're going to have to be paying more for going camping. Under this government you're going to have to pay more for a speeding ticket here in the province of Alberta. These are the kinds of things that are actually happening with the pieces of legislation that this government is bringing forward. I just can't understand how they can claim that they're making decisions that are going to be better for the livelihoods of Albertans when, in fact, they're going to have to dig deeper and deeper into their pockets in order to pay for the services that before they wouldn't necessarily have to.

I just wanted to go through – of course, I mentioned that this was an omnibus bill and that it's going to be amending four main pieces of legislation, and those are the Pharmacy and Drug Act, the Health Professions Act, the Alberta Evidence Act, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. There are also some minor housekeeping amendments to the Mental Health Act and the Health Facilities Act.

3:10

Now, the Alberta Evidence Act provides judges at fatality inquires with access to information from health system quality assurance committees to support more comprehensive reviews and better recommendations, and this amendment was a recommendation from two separate judges from two older inquiries. According to health officials it brings Alberta in line with other major provinces, which is a good thing. PLS is also doing additional work to make sure that this is all copacetic and that the necessary information will continue to be available to inquiries.

The Health Professions Act would allow pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to treat herd animals, as we heard the minister talking about. It appears to be a legislative fix that is required when another act was amended. In 2018 the federal legislation, the Food and Drugs Act, was amended, and that functionally disallowed pharmacy services for herd animals unless they were expressly allowed at the provincial level. When this legislation passes, we'll essentially just return to the status quo that we had under the previous government, the NDP government. It also clarifies that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will be able to treat companion animals, so pets.

The Pharmacy and Drug Act modernizes the way that the Alberta College of Pharmacy oversees the pharmacy operations and practices. The amendments are supported by the college, and the president is quoted as being supportive, so that's good. Also, it allows for different ownership structures of pharmacies in law while likely reflecting what already happens in practice, so this is something that we see as potentially being good.

There's also, of course, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. There are two consequential amendments to this act. First, it adds a provision so that when a government joins an injured claimant's lawsuit that ultimately ends up being unsuccessful, the government of Alberta is only responsible for paying the additional reasonable costs related directly to recovering the cost of health services provided to the injured claimant. Second, it moves an automatic fine for automobile insurers who fail to submit their annual premiums report to the Treasury Board and Finance. This is where the Minister of Finance has discretion on whether to apply a fine, essentially. This amendment is a solution in search of a problem. The Treasury Board and Finance was what would happen if the chief financial officer of an insurance company unexpectedly died right before the filing deadline. Of course, this is in the health statutes bill because the amount of premiums collected and reported to Treasury Board and Finance is then used by the Ministry of Health to determine health premiums that are charged on auto insurance packages.

I just wanted to highlight some of the changes there to each of those pieces of legislation but, of course, remind us all that this Health Statutes Amendment Act – or better stated, I would say that this government could be doing a lot better in order to address real issues and how they are impacting Albertans at this particular time given the COVID pandemic instead of reaching further into the pockets of Albertans with this particular piece of legislation, which is basically going to be favouring automobile insurance companies rather than favouring Albertans.

It's troubling to see this from this government because, of course, you know, we've had the billions and billions of dollars that have been basically directed towards corporations, some of those corporations that have actually left the jurisdiction, and we're not actually seeing actual economic benefits to the actual pieces of legislation that this particular government is bringing forward, Mr. Speaker. I think this is what more and more Albertans are starting

to see, that the promises made by this UCP government in their platform are not essentially coming to fruition.

I've always been someone who has been skeptical of Conservative governments, even before getting highly involved in politics, as I have for the last 10, 15 years or so, being an activist first and then, of course, being involved in my union and then eventually being elected here to office, and that is that narrative, that rhetoric that somehow Conservatives know what is better for the economy and better for Albertans and that they seem to know exactly how to make an economy function better.

Here we are two years into this government's mandate. We're not seeing any new jobs. They're trying to blame everything on the pandemic when we know that before the pandemic there were at least 19,000 jobs here in Alberta that were lost. Of course, that was exacerbated by the pandemic, exacerbated by the fact that this government decided to take half measures when dealing with the pandemic. You know, we've seen other jurisdictions around the world that are already going to see football games in stadiums, heading out to their local stadium to see a soccer match. This was months and months ago that this was happening, and it was because they tackled the problem head-on, and they put their citizens first because they understood the holistic approach. In order to keep citizens safe and also keep their economy functioning, they had to make drastic decisions at that particular time, and it would have been a lot shorter than what we're experiencing now.

You know, I understand there are a lot of Albertans out there that are really tired of this pandemic and having to stay home. I have heard from a number of constituents. They send me e-mails or we have conversations over the phone regarding the fact that the state of mental health of many Albertans is deteriorating because we've been in this pandemic for so long. One can't help but think. I mean, of course, hindsight is 20/20, but this government needs to realize that at the onset of the pandemic better decisions could have been made to make sure that we wouldn't be where we are right now, continuing to have – I mean, I think that yesterday we reached 2,000 people being infected by COVID here in the province of Alberta.

Member Ceci: Dying.

Member Loyola: Dying.

You have to wonder, like: could there have been better decisions made along the way? Albertans are asking themselves this question. They're asking themselves: why are there other jurisdictions where it's perfectly fine for people to go to a soccer match in a stadium filled with 80,000 people, yet here in Alberta we're still stuck? You need to be able to look at that.

3:20

You know, I'm not saying that it's, like, just take whatever they did there and implement it here. I'm not saying that. You've got to look at it, look at the insights. What can you learn from what other jurisdictions are doing in order to help us get through to the end of this pandemic? This is what Albertans are asking themselves, and this is what they're concerned about.

I can tell you that there are many Albertans out there that are suffering. I know I'm receiving the e-mails from constituents, so I can only assume that members on the other side of this House are also receiving similar e-mails in their constituency offices. But one of the biggest ones is the fact that they have to dig deeper and deeper into their pockets because of the decisions being made by this government while at the same time they're still paying the same amount of tax at the end of the day.

It comes down to priorities, and this government has chosen to put corporations as a major priority because they believe in this, you

know, outdated economic approach of giving money to corporations and that somehow that will trickle down.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has risen.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always an honour and privilege to rise and speak in this House. It even feels more special because I am able to rise and speak to a topic that Albertans and all Canadians take pride in. There is no doubt that our health care system, our Alberta health care system, is one of the best in the world. There is no doubt about this.

Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the member opposite, his comments. I appreciate that. Through you, I can tell you that this is an important piece of the legislation, but when I hear the member: the same ideology, the same stories. Whenever it is that we talk about the Alberta recovery plan, we don't hear much: the same script, the same ideology.

This is a serious piece of legislation, and I want to talk to you about this. We're talking about our health care system, and our government is bringing forward promising legislation that will help strengthen our pride in the health care system.

Bill 65, known as the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, will bring forward six practical amendments in six different pieces of existing legislation to help strengthen our health care system. Now, all six of these amendments will strengthen the health care system in our province, but there are a few sections that resonate with me and most on a personal note, and I know that there will be people in this House that will be able to see the significant value in the sections that I will highlight here today.

It's not about fighting with the health care professionals; it's just making it right. The first amendment will take place in the Pharmacy and Drug Act as it will provide Albertans with a more accountable, more modernized pharmacy system that offers profound protection for its patients while reducing red tape for the pharmacy system. We need to do it. We know that technology is moving upwards.

There used to be days when doctors used to write a prescription with the name of the dispensing medicine. I have seen the pharmacists who were dispensing the medicine by mixing a few ingredients and giving it to the patients, but through time it has been changed. When the world is looking towards online pharmacies and integrated systems, I think we need to bring some changes to make pharmacies, pharmacists, pharmacy owners more accountable.

This will lead to our pharmacies seeing more responsibility and accountability for legislative, regulatory, and licensing requirements that impact their daily operations. Ultimately, this means that the pharmacy system will continue to be able to offer Albertans outstanding health care opportunities so that they can operate safely and efficiently while also enabling pharmacists to be more responsive to ever-changing patient needs. This is a very important amendment to touch on because it helps put more responsibility in the hands of our pharmacists.

Over the past year we have learned that life is precious, where just about anyone can fall victim to illness no matter how strong we may think they are. Treatment for sick Albertans begins in the hospital, with our world-class health care system, but the path to recovery is provided by the pharmacies. Pharmacies need to be more accountable due to the significant role they play for Albertans. Giving them this new level of responsibility will lead to a more streamlined and accessible system while also improving health outcomes for Albertans at the same time.

The second amendment to highlight is the continuation of amendments to the Mental Health Amendment Act. I'll note that there were amendments made to the Mental Health Act just last year, but in 2021 we are promising additional administrative amendments to the Mental Health Act. I'm proud that our government is taking steps to make sure the Mental Health Act is as clear and consistent as possible to ensure that Albertans who are struggling will always have their rights protected. Specifically, our government is correcting some section references, revising overly broad wording regarding detentions, forms to be more specific as to what Alberta Health Services can work on, and repealing unproclaimed sections at the request of the stakeholders. Making these changes will not have an impact on the mental health care that Albertans receive already under the same act. These amendments are only the administrative changes that will continue to ensure the rights of mental health patients and respect that Albertans who require these services always have access to responsive care.

When we look at the next amendment, I'll be touching on the updates to the Health Professions Amendment Act, which is another change for Alberta's pharmacies. The proposed amendments will provide Albertans with greater choice when seeking access to professional pharmacy services who support animal health. The significant changes that would come with this amendment are that there would be expanded access to pharmacy services for herd animals and to clarify that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can provide pharmacy services to companion animals. This is a very important change to be made as it will provide Albertans who raise animals with options to access prescription drugs for their animals. Specifically, we will now see immediate support in our rural communities for those who raise animals.

The introduction of this amendment opens the possibility of helping rural Albertans provide faster care to their animals instead of having to wait for the veterinarian to arrive, which may take hours, for something that needs to be done immediately. This is a very important change to be made as a rural Albertan's herd is very important to the livelihood of their family. An animal in the herd not receiving the prescription drugs that it needs to live a comfortable life may cost the family thousands of dollars, which is obviously a significant financial hit that no one wants to experience.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many more significant changes that Bill 65, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, will provide that will improve health outcomes in Alberta's health care system. I briefly touched on three amendments that will be made, but there is so much more to go over as the debate carries on. I encourage everyone in this House to take the time to review the significant benefits that these amendments will have for all Albertans. We must get this bill passed as the sooner we do, the sooner that health outcomes can improve for Albertans.

Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members looking to join debate at this time? At this time I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In reviewing this legislation, I'll talk a little bit about some various provisions in here, but I think some of them seem good. Some of them seem less good. They don't seem like – and that, I think, can be said of most of this government's agenda right now – they're well focused on the things that are most important to Albertans. Certainly, there's a lot going

on with respect to health in this province right now. We are in the midst of a pandemic. You know, cases are spiking. There's a lot going on. I appreciate that the government has housekeeping things to do, but sometimes I think they maybe ought to focus better on some of these more important and more urgent issues first.

That being said, one of the things that is occurring in here is changes to the Alberta Evidence Act. In section 1, which amends section 9, we're talking about subsection (6), which is new. It's being added to the act. It says, "A witness in a public fatality inquiry may produce a quality assurance record, or a portion of a quality assurance record, that includes only the following information," and it lists it. Then the new section, subsection (7): "A quality assurance record or a portion of a quality assurance record produced in a public fatality inquiry shall not include," and then it's got some additional sections. Then subsection (8): "If information that is not authorized to be produced in accordance with this section can reasonably be severed from a quality assurance record, then the remainder of the record may be produced."

That all seems fine. I guess my concern is that what I thought I heard the minister saying and the member who just spoke was that this was giving judges in a fatality inquiry access to this information. Granting them access to the information is not the same as saying that a witness can produce it as a document in an inquiry. So I'm a little curious, and I'm hoping that the minister or someone from the government bench will be able to qualify or elaborate on why it is that it's set out like that.

I have here the recommendation. I know the minister referenced that there were two different fatality inquiries. I was able to find one quickly. The recommendation reads: the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice conduct a review of section 9 of the Alberta Evidence Act and consider permitting public fatality inquiries to have access to quality assurance records, proceedings, and recommendations and also that the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice conduct a review of section 9 – oh, that's the same thing or a very similar thing – and consider permitting public fatality inquiries to have access to quality assurance records, proceedings, and recommendations.

I feel like the ability to produce a document or to have it considered when produced as evidence differs somewhat from allowing the judge access to the full-blown materials. I'd be interested in hearing from the minister on exactly what is intended there because I actually do think that this is important. I think that fatality inquiries actually serve an incredibly important function in our system. I think some very good recommendations have come out of them.

I had the opportunity to review in depth in the last legislative session a fatality inquiry having to do with the death of a toddler in a day home that made some excellent recommendations that this UCP government chose to completely ignore when they brought in legislation dealing with that exact section. I'm glad to see that in this case, you know, the minister is at least considering the recommendations and bringing them forward, because I think that that is important. I think that all ministers should do that. Perhaps some others might, in this instance, emulate this. But I would like to understand whether that was the intention of the judge's recommendation, because it doesn't sound to me like quite the same thing.

Some other changes in here have to do with the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. This makes sense from a certain point of view. I'm on page 4 now. In subsection (5) they're creating a new section 38.1, and it talks about right of recovery against the Crown. Costs are obviously recovered by the successful party against the unsuccessful party in court. They're saying that they can only recover costs related directly to the Crown's right of recovery, costs reasonable and proper, that the defendant would not have incurred

the costs if the Crown had not brought the action based on the Crown's right of recovery, and that the Crown has obtained a judgment against the defendant based on the Crown's right.

Essentially, it's saying that if there's a private individual who is suing someone and the government sort of joins on, shall we say, to recover their medical costs, only the additional costs related to the addition of the Crown's lawsuit can be vested in the Crown, which – I don't know. I suppose that it saves money on one hand, but on another hand there's – I mean, this exists in several other jurisdictions. I don't think that it's obviously bad. I just think, having not examined this issue in great depth, there is the potential for sort of free riding, if you will, where work done on behalf of the original plaintiff is essentially to the benefit of the Crown, and then should the case be unsuccessful, the Crown doesn't bear the same risks as that plaintiff. I find that an odd choice, but it does seem to exist in other jurisdictions, so perhaps that's fine.

I'm a little curious. I mean, presumably, this has happened, and that's what the source of the concern is, but, I mean, judges are quite familiar with the assignment of costs. I'm a little curious why we sort of have to override their discretion, you know, a judge having potentially looked at the case and said, like: well, a lot of this work which was done on behalf of the Crown was done by the plaintiff's lawyer, and therefore the Crown ought to bear the cost risks inherent in the benefit that they would have received had their case been successful. Yeah. I would like to hear a little bit more about that.

There are, of course, several other sections in this, and one of them has to do with waiving fees for an insurance company being late in filing something. I think the first thing I would say about that is that I would like to know how this directly benefits individuals out there sort of paying insurance costs, because the cost of insurance has been skyrocketing. Certainly, the members opposite have a tendency to say: "Well, you know, for years it was capped at only going up at 5 per cent a year. That's so absurd, only 5 per cent a year." Now, imagine – imagine – if the cost of government was going up at 5 per cent a year what the members would have to say. But if they want to take the position that only allowing a 5 per cent a year increase on insurance is ridiculous, then they are free to take that position.

My concern here is that there were conversations between the NDP when we were in government and insurance companies about lifting that cap. What we said was: prove it. If you have some reason to explain why your costs, on an individual basis, are going up more than 5 per cent a year – so, then, we're taking out client-based growth or what you would call population growth if you were talking about individuals because it's the cost for each individual person. If inflation is at 1 and a half per cent, why are your costs, insurance company, going up at 5 per cent? Show that to us.

3:40

I actually don't think that's an unreasonable thing to request on behalf of the people of Alberta, to request that if an insurance company is going to increase their charges more than 5 per cent a year, a rate that significantly exceeds inflation, they provide some sort of justification for that, that they're able to say: no, no; this is, in fact, because of increased costs, not because we just want to give sort of bigger payouts to our shareholders.

I mean, who knows what would have happened in that alternate universe, because when this UCP government came in, they told the insurance companies they didn't need to provide that information. To me, that's problematic. Why would the public not be entitled to that? I think that that is a serious source of concern. When I see the government saying, "Well, yes, we can waive these fees; we're not going to demonstrate how it will benefit insurance payers; we're

not going to demonstrate how it will benefit average Albertans, but don't worry; trust us; we'll only do it if it's a really important situation," well, you know, in light of the fact that this government has previously taken the position that Albertans aren't owed an explanation for the skyrocketing costs of their insurance, that no one ought to have to prove that a 20 per cent increase in insurance is somehow justified on the basis of facts occurring in the real world, I don't know that "trust us" is a position that I'm willing to accept.

Those are a few of the questions that I have with respect to this. I mean, there are obviously some other changes which mostly seem like, well, modernization. We used that word a lot yesterday, but they do seem like fairly reasonable, shall we say.

So those are my questions with respect to this specific bill, and I hope we'll get answers. Certainly, yeah, just to boil it down, I guess, the questions were with respect to the changes to the Evidence Act. It appears that what was said is somewhat different than what was asked for in the fatality inquiry, so I would like to know why that is.

With respect to the late filing of insurance, I mean, all the rest of us wandering around in the world are required to, you know, renew our cars on time and renew our insurance on time and renew our drivers' licences on time and file our taxes on time, so I'm a little curious why that same rule shouldn't apply to insurance companies. I'd like to know a little bit more about that.

Then with respect to the Crown's Right of Recovery Act, yeah, I'm just a little bit curious if there was some specific problem that arose that this was attempting to solve.

All of that being said, I don't necessarily think this bill is bad although I am interested in the answers to some of those questions, but what I do think is that, you know, we're dealing with a government who has told us over and over again that they don't have time to deal with the big issues that face us. They don't have time to get money out the door to front-line workers, they don't have time to get money out the door for jobs programs, but they do have time to do this. Again, I'm not saying that it's necessarily bad. I'm just saying that if I'm an Albertan out there, I guess what I'm wondering is: why did these changes take precedence over the government taking the time to develop an actual jobs now program, to use that money that's coming from the federal government?

In government there's never enough time for the legislation that you want to bring forward and never enough money for the programs that you want to create. I mean, that is the difficulty of governing. But in light of that fact, I sometimes wonder about this government's use of their time, because I think that Albertans have bigger concerns having to do with the pandemic, having to do with fired EAs in schools, having to do with jobs that they need desperately, having to do with diversification of our economy. I believe that perhaps the government might focus a little more attention on those things.

That being said, I will await the answers to my questions.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any members looking to join debate? The individual who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. I thought you were going to finally out me there, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to thank my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. I won't take very long to address some of the issues that have been brought up with regard to Bill 65. I, too, was a little perplexed

listening to some of the debate from the other side with regard to this bill, particularly as it was framed as serious legislation. You know, when my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View posed a number of really big, important things that this province is going through with regard to COVID, with regard to the significant cutbacks to budgets that Albertans have come to believe would be there to support them, like the health care budget – I know it's the largest budget of the government. I know it's in the neighbourhood of \$22 billion, not \$25 billion, as my colleague from Medicine Hat was speaking of the other day on the radio. It is something that we need to ensure is nurtured, stewarded, and taken care of. But what we see for the health care budget that relates to the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, is that there's \$624 million less in that budget than had it simply tracked population and inflation since the election. So there's been a significant cut to it.

I know there are COVID-related increases. Those are going to go away when COVID is finally dealt with. I know there is a backlog in surgeries, that will cost money to address, because the system is focused on other things. But there is a ramping down of spending in that budget, and that affects Albertans. We know that that's serious, Mr. Speaker. But that's not what this statutes amendment act deals with. As the Minister of Health talked about, there are a number of pieces of legislation that are impacted as a result of this act before us today.

I was listening to my colleague from Calgary-Falconridge. I don't want to put words in his mouth, of course, but the things he mentioned were around pharmacists and herd animals, and he talked about these as being practical pieces of legislation. Now, you know, I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but practical pieces of fixes to legislation don't cut it in my world in terms of being there to address the urgent needs Albertans have. When I was Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, administration brought many practical pieces of legislation they wanted to see worked on, that they wanted to see improved. There's only a limited amount of time you have for cabinet time, for working with your administration, your ministry, the professionals there who come to you. You have to make some decisions. I think what I see here is a grab bag of – Calgary-Falconridge said that they were practical pieces of legislation, and he characterized them as serious. I don't necessarily agree with that assessment from him.

3:50

I do want to address a couple of things, Mr. Speaker. One of them my colleague, again, touched on. It's this whole area on pages 3 and 4 with regard to repealing parts and taking it out of – well, I'll just read it.

An automobile insurer that fails to file a report for a calendar year as required by this section shall pay a penalty.

What that's been amended to – it's on the other side of the page – is:

If an automobile insurer fails to file a report for a calendar year as required by this section, the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance may assess against the automobile insurer a penalty calculated in accordance with the regulations.

That really is – how should I put it? – a softening, and it leaves it up to the discretion of the Minister of Finance to decide if that insurer, that auto insurer, should pay to the government of Alberta if they fail to file important reports for the calendar year as required. We're not really given an understanding of what that assessment may assess against the automobile insurer "in accordance with the regulations." We're not seeing the regulations here, obviously. We don't know what they are.

But why give this new authority to the Minister of Finance? I don't think he needs it, necessarily. Certainly, he's got enough to

do. The economy is challenged. We have tens and tens and tens of thousands of Albertans out of work. You'd think that the attention not only of the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board but the whole cabinet would be focused on getting Albertans up and out of this COVID and improving our economy, attracting business. But we're dealing with these amendments to different statutes, as a result, coming before us today.

I just want to focus a little bit on the next page, Mr. Speaker. Again, I wonder how this will benefit Albertans, as my colleague has so rightly asked the question. It's this whole area of waiver of penalty or interest. It's a new section, and it looks to me like not only is the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance able to "waive or cancel all or any portion of any penalty or interest payable under this Division by an . . . insurer" – and this is interesting – "or refund all or any portion of any penalty or interest paid under this Division by an automobile insurer." It's the part (b) on page 4 that's really interesting, and it says: "in any . . . case, on or before 4 years from the end of the calendar year in which a penalty or interest is assessed against the automobile insurer."

The way I read that: say that during the NDP government and when I was President of Treasury Board, there was a fine assessed to an insurer because they didn't follow through with their obligations in 2018. The way I read this, and I'm prepared to be corrected, of course, is that if this passes – and it's a great likelihood that it will because of the majority on the other side – a penalty that was assessed in 2018 can be rescinded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. He can cancel all or any portion of that fine up until next year.

Mr. Speaker, I get that insurers want the best kind of business-operating experience they can have or climate they can have, and they do pretty well across the country. When we were government, we said: you know, prove that increases beyond 5 per cent on an annual basis are required, are needed. They started down that road when we were in government. We said: no, you're not going to get anything beyond 5 per cent until you show your books, essentially. I asked ministry officials to sit down with the terms of reference, to develop terms of reference with the industry so that we could understand how that business worked and if it was being fair to Albertans in terms of insurance, and they were going down that road.

Then the UCP government came in, and they immediately cancelled that work. What did we see, Mr. Speaker? We saw a collection – there were maybe 20, 25 insurers, and now there are fewer because there were mergers and acquisitions. We saw that the average increase to car insurance went far beyond 5 per cent, and there was no requirement to kind of justify that, save for what the market can bear and what people – it's not what people are prepared to pay, because they have to pay it – are charged.

Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that the waiver of penalty or interest will be a boon for the insurers. I can't remember how many or if any were assessed penalties back in '15, '16, '17, and '18, but were they in '18, they could approach the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and get that waived, all or part.

I wanted to make those points, Mr. Speaker. I do know there are other things in this bill, but those are the ones that caught my eye. I think the fact that they're there is a concern to me, and I think that instead of doing other things that are required, we're dealing with this bill, Bill 65, when, really, we need to be focusing on the really big issues in health care. I regret that the Minister of Health is not bringing that forward, I regret that other ministers have come forward and put their grab bag of amendments in this bill, and I regret that more ministers on that side weren't pushing back and saying: let's focus on what's going to be in the best interests, that will make a huge, consequential difference to Albertans.

Those are some of my comments, Mr. Speaker. I do think the fact that we're still railing against this big cut to health care is problematic. The fact that we are in a situation with doctors in this province as a result of the actions of the UCP government is something that would have been more important to deal with. The fact that we are seeing the erosion of trust and relationships in this – I think my colleague from Calgary-Falconridge was correct when he said, you know, that this is important. What is important is our health care system. We have a great health care system, but it is getting chipped away at by the actions of this government. He didn't say that part. He didn't say that there was significant discord out there, that not only nurses but doctors, other health professionals believe strongly that their interests aren't being addressed and met by the government of the day.

Those were things that he left out and that I want to put before the House to say that in my time in the chair of Finance we worked – and we didn't necessarily just believe the insurers when they said: we need more in terms of our premiums from Albertans. We said: prove it, and we will go to Albertans with the evidence. We weren't provided with that evidence, and rather than continue to make it clear to insurance companies that they need to provide the evidence, this government essentially rolled over and is doing little to protect the interests of consumers.

That's what I have to share with you.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 65, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, and I'd like to start by thanking the hon. minister for his work and introduction of this timely piece of legislation.

I really appreciate the members opposite, and I can appreciate what they're saying with respect to prioritization. You know, that makes sense to me. I understand what they're saying. What I would say, though, is that I've spoken with pharmacists directly, and I've spoken with ranchers, and for them this is critical. The timing of this is important for their livelihoods and for us to fix this issue for them. I would argue that for those individuals and for certainly constituents that don't technically live in my riding, because it's so small – but they live all around my riding, in the hon. Finance minister's riding. They certainly are very concerned that we get this done and that we get it done imminently. For their livelihoods and for their futures and for their families I would say that this legislation is critically important, to be timed now. Again, point well taken, but I think it sort of depends on your perspective, and certainly for my constituents and those in my region some of the changes in this act are very critical.

With that said, as has been mentioned by others, there are a number of pieces of legislation that are being amended in this act. We've got the Alberta Evidence Act, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act, some small amendments in the Health Professions Act, Mental Health Act, and the Pharmacy and Drug Act as well as a few regulatory changes.

Mr. Speaker, as many have said this afternoon, public health, of course, is critically important to Albertans and to our government, and never has it been more evident than now that public health is of critical importance as we deal with multiple challenges before us, certainly, the pandemic. That's why we've undertaken the

opportunity to evaluate the current acts that address public health in our province, and we want to ensure that they're modernized and that they're fit to serve Albertans best, now and going forward. I think that's a healthy practice of any government, to continually evaluate and make sure that your legislation is relevant and is modern and is still working for the residents, for the people.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go through some of the pieces. I know that many of the other members have addressed some of these pieces, so I'll try to keep my comments brief and not repeat what's been said already.

I'll begin by speaking on the amendments this act will make to the current Alberta Evidence Act. We know that privacy is very important to Albertans. In our increasingly technological society it often seems impossible to keep our private lives private. The same is true in health care, Mr. Speaker. In the particular instance of witnesses to public fatalities this act will provide increased protection for witnesses and for health care professionals as well. Previous legislation required these folks to provide certain items of contact information, and that will no longer be the case. This act will also ensure that no opinions or individually identifying information will be shared publicly. This is just one of the ways that our government is committed to respecting and protecting the privacy of Albertans going forward.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 65 will also amend the Crown's Right of Recovery Act, as many have talked about, which will increase transparency and ensure that tax dollars are being spent wisely. Our government was elected with a mandate of fiscal responsibility, and I think, again as many have mentioned, with the challenges before us – with the pandemic, with the pressure on the health care budget, with rising costs – now more than ever it's even more critical for us to look at every dollar and where it's going, and that fiscally responsible lens will be paramount as we go forward.

Once the pandemic is in the rear-view mirror – and I certainly hope that that's sooner rather than later for the benefit of all Albertans – it will be critical for us to look at where we spend our dollars and how we affect Alberta's recovery plan. I'm proud that this piece of legislation will ensure that Albertan tax dollars are not on the line in the event of an unsuccessful motor vehicle lawsuit in which the government is one of the claimants. The act provides further clarity about when the government can spend tax dollars on court cases and will continue to save Albertans money down the road.

Back to health care, Mr. Speaker. As I said, of course, health care is critically important to Albertans and this government, and I don't know that it's ever been more critical than at this time in history, certainly in my lifetime, anyway. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has taught us many things and continues to, especially the importance of mental health. Countless Albertans are facing isolation and separation from families and loved ones. Our government knows well the toll that is being taken on the mental health of Albertans, and that's why we're taking proactive steps to support mental health in our communities. I will add that our government has allocated \$53 million, just as an example, in mental health supports throughout the pandemic. I am proud to say that that is more than all of the other provinces combined. I think that was a bold step in support of Alberta and Albertans through a very, very challenging 13 months.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ending the stigma around mental health. That's why the proposed amendments to the Mental Health Act will ensure that the rights of mental health patients are respected and that Albertans receive quality, accessible care. This act will also provide greater transparency and clarity for Albertans who are undergoing treatment for mental health so that they can be assured of their rights, the quality of their care, and their

privacy. I want to assure Albertans that the amendments to the Mental Health Act will in no way negatively affect the quality of care that Albertans who are struggling with mental health will receive. I think I should repeat that. In no way will it be affecting the quality of care that they will receive. In fact, these modernizations to the Mental Health Act will ensure that Albertans continue to receive some of the greatest access to health care in the world.

Mr. Speaker, as I highlighted at the beginning of my speech, one of the things that is near and dear to the residents of my region is some of the changes with respect to animals. I'm happy to say that even animals will receive greater protection under this act. As we know, Alberta is home to tens of thousands of herd animals, with farming providing a way of life to many Albertans and, certainly, Albertans in my part of the province. Our great Albertan ranchers and farmers use these animals to produce food and provide services to folks across Alberta and, frankly, around the world. We in Alberta pride ourselves on the quality of our livestock.

While my constituency of Grande Prairie, as I've said already, is very, very small and pretty much entirely within the city boundary, I've heard and spoken with many ranchers in the surrounding area, who speak about the necessity of having healthy, strong animals. We are blessed in the Grande Prairie area to have three clear pillars of economics in our local economy. Of course, we have oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture, including ranching. Living in a rural constituency – although I say it's rural, we'll go with rural – has blessed me with many opportunities to speak with folks who depend on livestock and herd animals for their livelihoods, to put food on their own table, and that's why I'm proud of the pieces in this legislation, which ensure that their animals will be protected.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to economic recovery, and this is another way in which we are keeping that promise to Albertans. This act will expand access to pharmacy services for herd animals and clarify that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are able to provide pharmacy services as well to companion animals as well as expand access to prescription drugs for animals. This is yet another way that our government is looking out for Albertans and their herd and companion animals. Again I would say that it's so important for the ranchers. I believe it was a federal act that changed, and it caused some problems, so we heard loud and clear that this is critically important to the ranchers in Alberta, and we wanted to make this fix as soon as possible.

Allow me once more, Mr. Speaker, to thank the minister for the introduction of this important legislation. Our government is constantly searching for ways to improve and modernize our legislation, especially those that relate directly to the mental and physical well-being of Albertans. By periodically updating our policies, our government is ensuring that Alberta remains a great place to live and work. Some of the policies that are being amended by Bill 65 have not been reviewed in decades, and I think that they were overdue, for sure. Going forward, our government is committed to regularly updating our policies to remain on the cutting edge of modernization.

I'm greatly honoured to speak on this piece of legislation, now that the end of the pandemic is, hopefully, within sight, so that when it does finally come to an end, Alberta and Albertans will be ready and well equipped to fully realize their potential and get back to normal as quickly as possible.

4:10

I just wanted to – you know, so that you don't just take it from me, I actually pulled up a quote from somebody close to my riding, from La Crête. This is Cynthia Driedger, the owner and pharmacist at La Crête Apple Drugs. She says:

Animal owners rely on pharmacy teams for prescription medications for their animals. Pharmacy teams like mine have worked with veterinarians to support animal health in rural communities for over a century. We are vital . . .

We are vital.

. . . to their health and sustainability. Updating the legislation to reflect these practices is [very] welcome news.

I just wanted to add that so that it wasn't just my voice saying this, Mr. Speaker.

I support Bill 65, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, and I would encourage all members to support this bill also. I thank the hon. minister again for his work. With that, I am happy to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that I will move to adjourn debate on Bill 65. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 66 Public Health Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate April 13: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in response to Bill 66, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2021, at second reading. I had the pleasure of being here during some of the initial debate on Bill 66, that took place last night, as we start to take a look at this important piece of legislation, that has just been introduced this week and touches on such important subjects for Albertans and for how we operate, especially given the context of the pandemic under which we are.

Now, as a former member of the committee that was created to review the issues and the measures that are a part of Bill 66, I have a bit of a unique perspective on this piece of legislation and how we got here, to this bill being introduced, starting basically a full year ago, when the government passed Bill 10 in roughly 48 hours and chose to disregard objections from the Official Opposition throughout that debate process. I've certainly heard Bill 10 described as likely the most significant example of executive power overreach in Canadian history, and we saw very, very quickly Albertans expressing outrage at some of the powers that Bill 10 had given the government, not to mention that legal challenges started within weeks of that bill's passing.

As a result of that, the government chose to strike a committee to look at Bill 10 and to look at the entirety of the Public Health Act and to do that in, ideally, as public-facing a way as possible, to get feedback from Albertans about what was happening through Bill 10 and what needed to happen to kind of right the ship and get back on track in a way that was respectful to the Alberta public and made sure that Alberta had the public health legislation that we needed.

Now, I have some very strong criticisms around the process, and because of some of those criticisms, I think at this point I would like to move an amendment, Mr. Speaker, so I will just say that and pause.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

As is the process, any members who wish to receive a copy of the amendment, please put up your hand. You can also know that there will be copies at the tables at each entrance as well. How about we wait until we get copies up at the table, and then we'll move on from there.

Thank you, hon. member. I had a chance to take a look at a copy of it. For everybody's benefit, this will be referred to as RA1 going forward. If the hon. member would please read it in to the record for everybody's benefit as well, that would be appreciated, and then please continue with your comments. There are about 12 and a half minutes remaining.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Amendment RA1 reads that I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 66, Public Health Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 66, Public Health Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that due to the COVID-19 pandemic there has not been sufficient public consultation on the proposed legislative amendments.

Now I will make my case as to why I believe that members of this Assembly should consider supporting this reasoned amendment. We know that this legislation follows a committee process that included public engagement, but I would like to make the case that that public engagement was inadequate, and we now see in Bill 66 a number of issues that the committee did not consider and that were not debated through that process, calling into question, I think, the amount of consultation that Albertans were able to weigh in on something that we know thousands of Albertans felt very strongly about and was incredibly critical to so many.

Now, in making my case for why this reasoned amendment should be supported, I will start off with some of the committee process, just a little bit. At even the very first meeting the members of the Official Opposition were of the very strong view that in order for this to be as effective as possible, we needed this committee to speak to experts of a variety of backgrounds and types: experts in the legislative process, experts in constitutionality, and also experts when it came to the delivery of public services during a pandemic, of which we currently had a unique opportunity to have very real-world experience doing.

At the first meeting the Official Opposition moved several motions to try to invite experts to testify. As well, we recommended that socially distanced public hearings be held across Alberta. Now, that being said, the other options discussed included potentially virtual, social-distanced hearings, where we could hear from the Albertans impacted, where we could hear from the general public, who we knew had a strong interest in these topics because of the vast amount of correspondence our offices and, I assume, government offices were receiving regarding the issues in Bill 10.

Now, we were disappointed as committee members that the government chose not to allow the number of experts that we came into the committee originally hoping to talk to and to speak with about this. As we worked further through the committee and as the scope of the committee's work was further identified, there was certainly some inconsistency between the rationale for creating the committee, where the Minister of Health noted that the committee could help to determine if the legislation could be improved in light of our experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, versus the exclusion of pandemic response as part of the scope, that happened later during the committee. It was a bit of a challenge, but the scope was set for the entire act with a special focus on part 3.

4:20

At a subsequent committee meeting the Official Opposition again tried to put forward strongly the view that we needed to hear from more Albertans about this, that we needed to be able to have experts. In fact, we put forward a suggestion that 24 different experts from a variety of fields be allowed to come and present to the committee.

Now, the UCP, who did have a majority on this committee, as is typical, at that point narrowed that focus so substantially, down to an initial list of just four experts to come and present to the committee. Now, at the time the Official Opposition was assured that additional individuals and organizations could be invited at a later date, but we did not see that happen. As well, in the end the committee did not hold any public hearings, which I think was a missed opportunity to engage with Albertans on a subject that's incredibly important to them and was one of huge public interest given the pandemic that Alberta is currently making its way through.

Through the committee process I will say that there were times where the Official Opposition was concerned that the committee was not meeting frequently enough given the volume of work that needed to be done and the large scope, especially when the committee made the decision to include the entire scope of the act in its review.

Now, as we look at the recommendations that have been brought forward, there are a couple of things in Bill 66. First, none of the recommendations that the Official Opposition put forward in their minority report have been accepted through Bill 66, which is a concern because I think a lot of really good work went into that. I want to say thank you to the team at the Official Opposition who helped to keep us prepared and who helped to work on these important issues and draft the minority report, which I think does an excellent job of summarizing the committee, the process, and the work that we put into it.

As well, Bill 66 includes a number of changes that were not considered during that committee process, so even though the committee had the scope of the entire act with a focus on part 3, even though the government had the ability, through ministers, through their MLAs to potentially suggest areas of focus, there's been a real disconnect between what the committee recommended and what we now see in Bill 66.

I make reasoned amendment 1, that this be not now read a second time, simply because I'm of the strong view that we didn't hear from all of the people we could have. We didn't get the chance to go out and talk to Albertans, again, either with the COVID precautions or possibly through Zoom meetings. I mean, we've all gotten very proficient in engaging with constituents virtually these days, but those opportunities were missed through the operation of this committee. Now that we have Bill 66 and we find amendments in the bill that I cannot find in the public feedback that was received, I think that making sure that there is sufficient public consultation is incumbent on this government, and right now in its current form Bill 66 does not reflect a thorough and engaged consultation process with the Alberta public.

There are a number of things that I know the committee did not get a chance to really dig into and that I'm quite concerned about, one of them being the ability for the government and AHS to recover costs of enforcing public health orders. I was listening to the bill debate that took place here last night. Of course, the Official Opposition has only really just seen Bill 66, introduced this week. We had some time on it last night, but truly today is one of the first days at second reading that we're getting this chance to engage in the debate.

When it comes to recovering costs of enforcing public health orders, some of the previous speakers that I've had the opportunity to listen to really raised some interesting scenarios. What would happen if AHS was trying to recover costs from victims of the Fort McMurray wildfires? What if AHS used mechanisms to recover costs for enforcing public health orders at the GraceLife church? These types of cost-recovery scenarios could escalate or cause further conflict. I don't fully understand the implications, in part

because they were not considered by the committee process that I was a part of.

Through this reasoned amendment I certainly hope to hear more from the government about how they can have the original Bill 10, an entire committee process that limited debate – I will suggest one other way that the committee process was limited. We had Dr. Hinshaw appear and present before the committee. When that happened, the Official Opposition asked if Dr. Hinshaw could be brought back again. It appeared that we had general consensus and that this would be something that was absolutely doable, yet at a subsequent meeting, when we passed a motion to invite Dr. Hinshaw back, the government caucus members voted against that. We ended up only hearing from Dr. Hinshaw once rather than having had the time just to listen to her presentation, review research, and come back and ask further detailed questions. Certainly, the debate was limited, and that is why this reasoned amendment refers to “not . . . sufficient public consultation.”

I anticipate that the government may tell us the number of public submissions that were made to that committee. I agree that there was an opportunity for public submissions, but there's a disconnect between what that committee was doing and what we now see in Bill 66. I think we can acknowledge that we did not go out to the public through Zoom, through public meetings, that a number of experts were not brought forward to the committee despite the Official Opposition trying multiple times to have their voices heard as part of the committee process.

Bill 66, which we are now debating, raises questions for me, raises questions for members of the public. We, again, with the bill having just been introduced, are currently engaging with stakeholders to try to find out how the government's approach in Bill 66 could impact various stakeholders, including enforcement, including the general public, including those constitutional experts who are looking to make sure that this bill is working along the lines that it was intended to.

There was certainly an interesting moment at the committee. At one point the UCP MLAs voted against a recommendation to reverse Bill 10. Although we are now seeing some of that work here in Bill 66, it was certainly a moment that stands out to me at the committee process. I went back to some of my notes through the committee process, and there were a couple of times where the Official Opposition was putting out press releases to try to raise attention to what was happening at the committee. Not only that, but also to apply pressure to the government to engage more genuinely and fulsomely at the committee process. A number of our press releases through that time spoke to experts not being allowed to be brought forward to speak, not being able to go and have those public town hall type consultations, where some back and forth can be allowed and we get the opportunity to ask questions.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see – the individual who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I caught your eye because I'm the closest person. I'm thinking that's what happened.

I appreciate the hon. member outlining the logic behind her reasoned amendment and being a member of the committee that did work through the infrastructure of this Bill 66. The part that sort of caught my eye – or it caught my ear, I should say – is when the hon. member was talking about how there were certain things that were talked about, but then she was surprised when she opened this up just yesterday or the day before and saw some other amendments that had been inserted into Bill 66. So, you know, as I am just going to be learning about this bill here this afternoon for the first time, I

would like to know what those things are that were not considered in the committee that have been amended to this bill as it stands here for us today to consider.

The second part of that is: why would one think that those things were added and were not debated and/or outlined in the committee process, right? Did something happen afterwards that necessitated some additions, or were the omissions there for another reason? I mean, those are two important issues that I would like to work through this afternoon.

4:30

The part that I was concerned about when I heard about this bill in the media, at first, was this sort of element of absolving the government of liability in certain circumstances. Then the second part of that was this notion of the recovery of costs for different issues that might arise in terms of health and safety and whatnot. You know, again, we want to presume the best but must legislate for the worst and for every contingency. I was just looking in the news the other day where someone had been talking about – now, this is a slightly different issue, but not really – how someone had been billed by the fire department for coming out to a call \$61,000 or something like that, right?

An Hon. Member: Sixty-two thousand dollars.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. It was, like, not insubstantial. It sort of, at first glance, flies in the face of essential services and emergency services, which include health care, of course, and the notion that those things are there for a person when they need them, you know? Again, we must prepare for any contingency, but certainly if you start to look at someone being called using EMS, for example, and in a compromised situation and then with that threat of liability being waived, number one, and, number two, being billed for those things, then people sometimes can be less likely to engage those services that they actually need, like if your house is on fire or you've crashed or something.

I remember some years ago when I was on a bike path in the ravine, coming across a gentleman who had fallen off his bike. He needed an ambulance, for sure, right? Like, he had scraped himself up and he seemed a little bit incoherent, so I think he hit his head as well. But he was certainly conscious, and he just pleaded with me to not call an ambulance because he had had that happen to him before and he got stuck with a bill that he couldn't afford, you know? I mean, this is, Mr. Speaker, the kind of thing that we don't want to build into a bill.

I just wanted to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods again: what's been added that's different from when you were in the committee? Why do you think that happened? And do you think that's a good thing for us to consider when we're deciding whether to support this bill or not?

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Edmonton-Mill Woods, 20 seconds.

Ms Gray: Ten seconds?

The Acting Speaker: Twenty.

Ms Gray: I will say that you've already mentioned that the cost-recovery piece: not discussed at committee. Why did the government include this in Bill 66? I cannot answer that question, but we have government members across the way who I hope will be able to reconcile the difference between what the committee looked at, what is in Bill 66 as well as the need for more public consultation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I meant to say 20, and I thought I did, but it worked out quite well anyways.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for her contributions. I do find her debate and her questioning actually always very thoughtful. She does clearly do a lot of work to come to her positions.

In terms of the amendment put forward, I would just like to focus on one aspect of it that I think gives me pause. I hope it would allow members of the government caucus and all members in this House to consider that the committee, the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee, was struck to review legislation, the Public Health Act in particular, and not review the pandemic response. I do understand how those are intertwined, particularly when you're in the middle of a pandemic.

One of the things that I believe it was Dr. Hinshaw clearly asked us as a committee to consider was that not every pandemic that we're trying to prepare for and not every emergency, not every public health emergency that a province should prepare for would look exactly like the one that you're in at the time. I think that was probably the most poignant and helpful advice that I received as a committee member serving on that committee as well as realizing that the particular circumstances you find yourself in at the time have a huge bearing on the perspective that you're looking through. I believe, from government caucus, that it was our primary concern not to have that lens skewed and to forget the fact that we were there to look at the Public Health Act and how it would respond to any number of potential emergencies and situations in the future, not just a pandemic.

That was one of the primary considerations that limited us or our thinking of who we invited to speak. We did hear speakers from the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms because they did have legislative understanding and perspective. We thought that would be helpful. We did hear from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, again a perspective that would have a legal and legislative background, which would be helpful for reviewing legislation.

I dare say that the Official Opposition, in all good intention, did at times choose to focus on how the Public Health Act was applied in certain circumstances, which is what I believe led them to invite different individuals and members of the public, for instance, from Cargill, who at the time were experiencing a very significant outbreak. Again, that would be, in my opinion, looking at how a government was responding to a certain pandemic at a certain period of time and not the act overall.

Again, I felt that the committee was not seeking general opinions on actions. It was not seeking opinions on union work or workplaces or plants. It was not seeking opinions on health and safety. It was not seeking opinions on the public perspective of the pandemic. All of those things are vital and important and should be considered at a time, possibly when the pandemic is concluded, but at the time I felt very, very strongly that the committee was set to focus on the Public Health Act itself.

I'm pleased that we did include in this legislation the provision to review the act every 10 years for that very same purpose: things change, your perspective is growing, and as a public we continue to learn.

With all due respect to the member opposite and her impassioned debate, from my perspective, I would urge members of the government caucus not to support this particular amendment at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and respond to the hon. member's comments here. I think the hon. member is basically mistaken when he speaks against this reasoned amendment. I think that, pretty clearly, there wasn't an adequate amount of work done at the committee, right? Pretty clearly I think my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, who moved the amendment, spoke quite extensively around how the public health review committee did not do the work that was required, for example, when they requested the second appearance from Dr. Hinshaw and were denied by the government caucus. I think that that's something that shows the government caucus was not serious when they were looking at actually meeting with the stakeholders and actually doing the consultation that was required. The government caucus was not serious and was not taking the review committee in a manner that would have allowed them to actually go and do a fulsome debate and a thorough debate.

There are many things that were not contemplated by the committee at all that are currently in the Public Health Act as proposed, for example, as we've spoken to extensively today, the notion of recovering funds. If the government member that just spoke, that I'm replying to right now, the Member for Lethbridge-East here, wants to say that there was sufficient consultation on the recovery of funds, then can he point me to a single record in the committee *Hansard* of where recovery of funds was brought up by the committee? Can he point me to a single consultation done during the committee that included the recovery of funds for public health orders, right? It simply wasn't done. The member is either mistaken or misrepresenting what happened. Of course, I won't suppose that any member would do that intentionally in this place, Mr. Speaker, but certainly we know that there is more work to be done.

4:40

We know that this bill brings in clauses that were not consulted on, that were not included, and, frankly, it's something that was pushed through, so it seems as though, despite the work that was done at committee, the government already had a plan. The government knew what they wanted to move forward with, knew what they wanted to present in this bill, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2021, and wanted to do that without the proper and thorough work. We know now that we've seen what the government wanted to propose. It was clear that they had wanted to propose these types of amendments, and we've seen those changes now. We see them because, of course, they've been tabled and we're debating them in this place. Now that we know what the government is actually talking about, we should go back to committee, and we should go and actually have those conversations, right?

We should talk about the issues that the government is interested in. Perhaps the government caucus wasn't aware of the issues that the government wanted to raise, they weren't aware that they wanted to put in provisions like the recovery of funds, for instance, at the GraceLife church, as has been mentioned already, right? That's a real issue that's happening right now. Like, we saw massive protests just days ago, where public health orders had to be enforced by police. We're seeing real cases of this happening right here and now. And when we talk about these things happening, it's clear that none of that work was done, that none of the consultation was done.

We didn't hear from the experts. We didn't hear from the stakeholders. We didn't even hear from the MLAs about it, right?

We did have these deliberations as a committee – I think I subbed in for one or maybe two of those committee meetings – but basically none of this work was done because we weren't aware that it was going to be brought forward in this way. We weren't aware that this was going to be an amendment as it moves forward. It seems pretty disappointing to me that the government would oppose this reasoned amendment. I think that it's something that's very reasonable as it is a reasoned amendment. I think that it's something that when we look at it and we say that public consultation is key to what we do here, it's key to understanding what Albertans want and how we should be implementing legislation that affects them.

I mean, again, when we look at, for example, just the public health committee's minority report that was presented by the opposition, we can see very clearly that we think that there were significant portions of the committee process which were inadequate, right? We think that there were significant portions of the committee process which didn't address some of the constitutionality issues around Bill 10, which didn't address some of the powers that are being brought in under this bill right now, that didn't address many of these changes.

Despite this government now saying that they did enough work and this government member saying that he did enough work at committee, we know that when the opposition caucus asked to have a significant number of experts present, that would have been able to speak, I think, authoritatively to the implications of some of these changes, that would have been able to speak about how these would have far-reaching impacts, the government caucus chose not to hear from those stakeholders, chose to deny the request of the opposition.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on RA1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to debate.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to stand and demonstrate my approval of this particular reasoned amendment being brought forth by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, of course. As has been highlighted by a number of colleagues on this side and during debate last night, I think that it's fairly evident that the process by which the government chose to basically have during this whole committee process, the way that they addressed and approached it, showed a lack of true willingness to consult with a broad range of Albertans that would be directly impacted by this piece of legislation.

I mean, I don't have the Blues in front of me, but I do remember that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who did participate on the committee, last night made comments around the fact that the members on the government side who were part of the committee didn't even want to invite their own constituents and stakeholders within their own constituencies to actually participate in the feedback, to provide insight on the process. That for me, right there, is a huge red flag. I mean, why wouldn't they want to consult their own constituents on this particular piece of legislation? That I find unfathomable. I think it's important that there were a number of recommendations also that were made by the opposition during the committee process, and none of those were actually delved into deeply in terms of the stakeholders that were actually invited into the process to provide their insights.

I think that this is a second chance. This is an opportunity for this Legislature to send this back to committee so that we can actually have an appropriate level of consultation on all the different aspects of this piece of legislation. I'll remind members of the Legislature that there were recommendations from the Official Opposition to resolve Bill 10's unconstitutionality. There were basically two

recommendations there: first, that the unilateral powers of ministers to write entirely new laws while bypassing the Legislature be removed – I'm glad that that issue in particular has been essentially addressed in this new version of the legislation that we have before us – and, second, that the powers to modify current laws passed by the Legislature during an emergency be removed.

It's important here that we address why this was important. I know I spoke to this in debate last night, but I just want to stress this because I think it's so important that Albertans realize that this was this government going down the wrong path. Here we have a firm, concrete example where this government has basically done a one-eighty and has decided that, yeah, this shouldn't have been part of the legislation.

But guess what? This same approach, this same power grab exists in a number of other pieces of legislation that this government has brought into this House and, because of their majority, has passed, essentially taking power out of the hands of agencies, boards, and commissions and putting those powers directly into the hands of the ministers of this government, within this cabinet, to make those decisions, where before they were done in a much more democratic way. They were done by committees. They were done by members of agencies coming together to debate, to provide insight that they would also do consultation with people that were directly impacted by the decisions that were being made, as is their duty within these agencies, boards, and commissions, of course.

Here we have an example of the government doing a one-eighty on this particular issue. For me, that calls into question all these other pieces of legislation. Why did they decide to do it for this particular piece of legislation, yet it's going to stand in all those other pieces that they have brought forward into the House and ultimately passed because of their majority? Here we have a specific example of how it was unconstitutional. It was unconstitutional for this actual piece to be even written into the piece of legislation, so for me it begs the question – I'm not saying that it is in all aspects or in all the pieces of legislation that the government brought forward – that we should take a second look at these other pieces of legislation, then, and perhaps the government should be doing a one-eighty on those as well.

But, specifically, we're talking about Bill 66. We've had – a number of my colleagues on this side of the House have stood up and have stated how inadequate the consultation process was. Last night the Member for Edmonton-Glenora – again, I don't have the Blues in front of me to quote her directly – of course, made the comment that members from the government caucus decided that they only wanted stakeholders from Edmonton to be consulted. Why was that? That's another red flag for me. They didn't want people from their own constituencies to be consulted, and then they only wanted stakeholders from Edmonton to be consulted: again, another red flag, Mr. Speaker. Why didn't they want stakeholders from all over the province to be involved in this process?

4:50

For me, it's enough to say that this piece of legislation should be sent back to committee and that we should be making sure that we're consulting all those people within the province, at least putting the call out to Albertans that will be directly impacted by this piece of legislation so at least they can provide some insights. I've been through the process before. I'm on several committees. While we were in government, I even chaired a few committees. I know that it's an extensive process, but at the end of the day you're getting feedback that you may not know about. This is the wonderful thing about the consultation process.

I said it last night in debate, and I'll repeat it again here today, Mr. Speaker. The fact that this government tries to claim that it

doesn't make decisions based on its ideology: it couldn't be further from the truth. A lot of what they're bringing forward into this House in piece of legislation after piece of legislation is, in fact, their particular ideological approach when it comes to the economy. We see it time and time again. I would argue that these approaches are incredibly outdated.

You know, we live in more modern times, and the solutions to the issues, the problems, the concerns that Albertans have are multifaceted. I've said it before: demonstrate for me with statistics, with research, with investigation that this will actually be better for Albertans, and I'll be one of the first people to vote for it. But we don't get that from this government. We get ideological approaches. That's a fine place to begin. It's perfectly fine to start from there. There's nothing wrong with that. But then you need to make sure that you're bringing in specialists, people with knowledge and wisdom around these issues, so that you're consulting with them and you're actually bringing forward a piece of legislation that you know will actually be improving the lives of Albertans. This is not what we're seeing.

In fact, in a number of cases I would argue even that the government goes out to find particular research that has been done and only looks at that particular research that actually supports their ideological approach, and then when they have those examples of that particular research, they ignore all the other research. But how can that be, Mr. Speaker, like, in the time that we are right now? It wouldn't have been acceptable at any time but especially now, when Albertans are so awake to what is happening within their province when it comes to social, economic, and political decision-making that happens within their province. People are starting to see through the narrative that is only ideologically focused, and they see how specific research is being utilized to support a particular ideological stance and that all other investigative research is being ignored.

I mean, look at the whole issue of climate change, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't have the exact numbers on it, but you've got, I would say, an incredible portion of researchers out there that are supporting and demonstrating that climate change is real, that humans contribute to that climate change, that we need to make decisions now in order to change that for our future, or else there are going to be detrimental impacts on the environment and the health of Albertans.

Then you have, like, these documentary filmmakers that come out with a little documentary saying that all this climate change mumbo-jumbo is false. We've even had members of the opposition stand up and support some of those documentaries inside this House. They accept so-called research – and I use air quotes there, of course – to support their ideological stance on certain things and then just ignore all the other research that actually demonstrates that this would be the wrong way to go. This would not be actually good for Albertans. It wouldn't benefit Albertans, not now, not in the long run, and not generations and generations and generations from now, Mr. Speaker, which is our responsibility.

When we're in this House, we're not here to make decisions just for now. Of course, we're trying to do what's best so that we can aid the economy and the movement of the economy in a particular way, but we also need to keep in mind: what are the long-term effects of the decisions that we're making right now inside of this House? I remember being a young activist here in this province and calling into question a lot of the decisions that were being made by Conservative governments. They didn't have the long-term view of the impact that their decisions were having on the people of Alberta and the people of this country.

I think that there's a level of – and I get the fact that Conservatives, you know, want less regulation. They want as little regulation as

possible because, according to them, too much government involved in processes is a bad thing. I'll remind the members of the House, Mr. Speaker, through you to all of them and to all the people who are listening, that the point of having these regulations is to make sure that things are fair – make sure that things are fair – because of the intricacies of how the economic, political, social, cultural factors all play in together. You can make an economic decision that can have drastic social and political effects.

If you're not having that long-term view of how it's going to potentially impact the province moving into the future and you're only thinking about the here and now, this is when we get into trouble, and this is why it's so important . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a) I am pleased to rise this afternoon to comment and ask questions of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie with respect to his views on the amendment that's before us, the amendment to not read the bill a second time as it was not the subject of proper public consultation. I know that had there been the consultation that one would hope that legislation in this House receives, there would have been many elements of the Public Health Amendment Act, 2021, that probably wouldn't appear in the form they are in and perhaps would not have needed to be put into legislation at all.

Under the act a number of the proposals are certainly walking things back that were the result of a political mess created by Bill 10. That particular power grab was something the public objected to quite vehemently, and as a result, of course, we're seeing the Public Health Amendment Act brought forward to rectify many of the wrongs that were embedded in that piece of legislation. As a consequence, the amendment that we're bringing forward says that we think that there should have been greater consideration of the consequences of the bill itself and the amendments that we're now seeing under a public consultation process.

5:00

This Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie I would invite to talk a little bit about some of the other things that have had to have been walked back as a result of the reversal that this is of Bill 10 and the power grab that prompted a lawsuit and a party rebellion last year. I invite the member to comment on the whole theme of this government walking things back after failing to seek adequate public consultation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, with about two and a half minutes.

Member Loyola: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The point that I was making that I feel so adamantly about is the fact that this didn't receive the appropriate consultation.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The fact is that when we skip steps, when we leave people out of a consultation process who are directly being impacted, then it's going to have a drastic effect on having that holistic approach and look when it comes to actually making decisions within this House, right? This is what I find absolutely essential and why I'm supporting this particular reasoned amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, because I believe that we could gather so much more insight on the elements covered within this bill. We can actually learn and bring in other perspectives, learn from those perspectives so that we can make sure that we're not

making the same mistakes that we have made in the past. It's essential that we continue looking at making legislation within this body that way. I think that it's something that we really need to adhere to. We need to do our best to consult with people, listen to people, especially those that are being directly impacted by the decisions that we're making.

Also, as I was stating in my prior comments, it's about really making sure that we're – like I said, parentheses, there's nothing wrong with starting from an ideological approach. Start from there because, essentially, that is what you're trying to create. You're trying to implement a particular approach, an idea towards how you want society to function, but it's got to be based on science. It's got to be based on research. It's got to be based on investigation, on how all the particular elements of our society, the aspects of our society, are going to be impacted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1 to Bill 66. Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this amendment as I am fully in favour of returning this particular initiative back to the committee process based on the fact that the previous committee process was essentially flawed, and the evidence, of course, that it was indeed flawed has come out in the fact that this bill as we are seeing it here today in the House is necessary because some of those flaws have resulted in the government being sued and challenged on constitutional grounds regarding the original bill, which would have been referred to as Bill 10. We know it's flawed and we know that the government recognizes that it's flawed, but we wish that they would take full responsibility for it being flawed and understanding that the flaws come from the process, not simply from, you know, an error in the judgment of this government although, certainly, it does validate an error in judgment of this government.

It demonstrates to us a problem that we see with this government quite frequently, and that is that committees are struck always for ceremonial purposes. The actual work of the committee is usually not what the government has purported to say that it is. They strike committees to write reports to guide government on policy-making, but the committee is given the mandate to essentially validate a decision that was made prior to the striking of the committee. We've seen that, of course, in many reports such as the MacKinnon report. That really was not a substantial review of the situation at hand but, rather, was a compilation of one-sided and sometimes incredulous evidence to support a predetermined outcome.

Here we have in this case a similar sort of problem, where a committee was struck and then the committee was not even allowed to engage in the activities that the committee was originally struck for. I know that the Member for Lethbridge-East spoke not too long ago to indicate that this committee was not about the government's response to COVID-19 in spite of the fact that the act that was being reviewed is the primary act that governs the government's intervention in a pandemic. It's the central act that actually governs government response in this particular case. At the time of establishing this committee, it was said by the UCP Minister of Health, and I'll quote that for the House at this time. Quote: the Public Health Act, originally introduced in 1907, is one of Alberta's oldest laws; that is why we created the Special Select Public Health Act Review Committee, with a mandate to review the act, including recent amendments, to determine if it can be improved in light of our experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The very reason why this special select committee was established clearly identified that it was to review the act in total and that it was

particularly to review the act in light of our experience under COVID-19. Then, when the committee began to meet, the government started to interfere and stopped the committee from doing the work that the committee was established to do, which tells me that there was an a priori agenda that was being followed here and that the actual establishment of the committee was not what it was purported to do, very much as I indicated earlier, that the MacKinnon report was in the same nature not really what it was that the government has indicated that it was for.

I think we're back here today to look at this process and to ask the government to learn from its lessons and establish the committee to do a job. It thwarted the committee from doing that job through its members on the committee, denying them the right to discuss the lessons learned from COVID-19 and review how the act has guided the government. As a result, the end product was unacceptable. It became obvious that it was unacceptable after the committee report came forward allowing unconstitutional aspects of the bill to be brought forward and passed by this Legislature. It wasn't until this government was actually sued by some of its closest allies in the province around this bill that they realized that, in fact, the evidence that was given not only by members of the opposition but by some pretty significant people in the community around this bill was that this bill indeed was unconstitutional and that we would not be able to proceed with the bill as Bill 10 was originally set up, so we had to come back into this particular Legislature and change the bill that they originally brought in because of its unconstitutionality, a very big consideration here.

5:10

I mean, when you're literally writing a bill that defies the Constitution, you're getting evidence from the opposition saying that the bill is unacceptable because it's unconstitutional, and then you bring it into the House and you pass it anyways, it tells me that you're really not considering the process of the committee appropriately, not learning the lessons, not listening to the evidence that's been brought forward.

I noticed that at the time one of the experts that did testify before the committee – it was Michael Bryant, the executive director of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association – in his testimony told the MLAs that Bill 10 was “both unconstitutional and it's harmful to your constituents.” That's some pretty damning evidence being brought in at the time to the committee that was completely ignored by this government. That's the problem here. The government kept denying the committee the right to fully examine the questions at hand. They kept denying the committee the right to bring in the appropriate people and do proper consultation to help guide things in the bill. As a result, we ended up in a flawed bill, a disastrously flawed bill, because it was unconstitutional, and we are here back in the House with a bill that not only does not correct all of the problems that were addressed by the committee in the first place but actually adds issues that were not addressed by the committee at all. So there's been no committee review on some of the new sections in the bill.

This process is, you know, ridiculous at best and deeply flawed at worst, I guess. As a result, it is very important that we consider this amendment to send this back to committee to actually address the issues that should have been addressed in the first place and consider the issues that should have been considered at the time.

For example, we have learned during this COVID-19 crisis that the role of the chief medical officer of health is an extremely important role in this province, but what we haven't done is that we haven't actually looked at the role of the chief medical officer and whether or not that role needs to be redefined. The definition of that role is quite ancient in terms of legislation, yet we learned through

modern issues such as COVID-19 that that role actually needs to be well defined because it absolutely defines the reality of our world right now, including influencing factors which are connected to the life and death of Albertans. Unfortunately, we're in a position now where we have over 2,000 Albertans who have died from COVID-19. That would tell us that the role of the chief medical officer is a very important one.

The committee began to look at the issue of whether or not the chief medical officer should be an independent office. Should it be taken away from political influence, and should we be establishing it such that its only function is the protection of Albertans? Instead, we are left with a role of the chief medical officer that, in spite of their dramatic responsibilities and despite their obvious extensive history of education and experience that would make them the best people to make decisions during a time of medical crisis, is reduced to merely being information givers and advisors to the government of the day, a government who has no history of dealing with these kinds of crises, has no education in terms of the medical factors involved in this crisis, has no experience involved, yet they're the ones making the decisions, not the person with the medical knowledge, not the doctor understands the research and can make the best decisions. As a result, we have seen what we now know to be a very chaotic response to COVID-19 in this province by this government, one which has exacerbated all the worst aspects of COVID-19 and has failed to prevent the terrible tragedy of – now we are experiencing a third wave with a new variant and the risk of death for significant numbers of people, which has been acknowledged by the Premier.

We now know that it isn't just simply vulnerable people, as who were primarily affected in the first wave of this crisis, but now we are finding that children and young adults are being dramatically affected and are susceptible to significant personal threat and possible loss of life. If that's the situation here – and it is – the evidence is that this government has been very poor in its response to dealing with COVID-19 because of their political influences on them. In fact, they had some – what was it? – 17 members of their own caucus write a letter indicating that they did not want the government to make good medical decisions with regard to this crisis at this time, or objecting to good science being used to make decisions.

Of course, we can see what happens when you leave these decisions in the hands of people who are politically influenced rather than giving these kinds of decisions to the chief medical officer of health, who would make those decisions not based on political influences and the fear of losing votes or the desire to win particular friends in particular places but make the decisions based on good medical science on how to deal with things. We have seen, of course, countries that did that kind of thing. We have seen countries like New Zealand, who made good, strong medical decisions and as a result of those good, strong medical decisions have not suffered the ups and downs and the vagaries of this crisis that we have suffered here in this province.

These are the kinds of things that were on the table at the time when this committee was originally established and were neglected by this government. It's time to go back, to stop neglecting the good evidence, to stop neglecting the suggestions by the opposition, which could have saved us a significant amount of grief, and to make better decisions about how we should be amending this act. I agree with the original intention of the minister, that it's time, after all these years, to review this act appropriately.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a), if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. The Member for Edmonton-North West has the call.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for, I think, providing an excellent survey of how we got to this point in regard to Bill 66. Quite frankly, it reminded me of the whole fiasco around Bill 10 and why we are having to use time and space and effort to try to backtrack on some of those things that were most obviously unconstitutional and litigious potentially. They were, in fact, and that's where this government ended up. You know, as a general strategy for creating public policy, if you're factoring in litigation and time through the courts, then probably that's a sign that the legislation is a problem, right? So here we are again trying to cover from Bill 10, and again I'm seeing at least a couple of things in here that don't necessarily pass the standard test for being able to stand in court, for example.

5:20

This cost recovery element that has been added to this Bill 66: I'm finding it confusing, for one thing, because, you know, what seems normal and what a government usually does in regard to enforcing the law is to put in a series of fines or even jail time for breaching the law, right? This idea of moving into a whole new category, which is to try to expense the cost of enforcing the law on somebody who's been convicted of breaking that law, enters a whole new world that – I'm not a lawyer – certainly is categorically different from a fine structure or even an incarceration structure. Mr. Speaker, I find that to be – again, it just raises alarm bells, I think we need to take it to get legal advice, quite frankly, before we move further on this bill.

That's what I'm seeing, and that's what I'm hearing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford intimating, that we need to take some time to move back and see if this is the proper path to go. That's the one area that I'm seeing that potentially could derail this. I'm curious to know if the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford can see any other pieces here that could end up in court or end up being, you know, sued or unconstitutional and so forth. I know the hon. member is not a lawyer, but it kind of is in the blood a little bit, I know. You hang around with lots of lawyers and judges; I know that. That's one issue.

The other one is that, you know, I can't help but wonder why this UCP government is so interested in opening up health policy and the Health Act so relentlessly. Almost every session there's some version of opening up the Health Act. The hon. minister, when he introduced this – I think I was here – was talking about how old the act is. Well, it's old because it started when the province started. But it's been changed, and it has evolved over time, like many other acts, too, that govern this province.

Public health care is a fundamental responsibility that we have as a Legislature. This notion of "Oh, well, it's last year's model; let's give it a paint job and fix it up or whatever" is facetious, at best, and potentially makes me very suspicious, at worst, Mr. Speaker, because I have seen a series of Conservative governments pass through this fine Chamber, always casting longingly towards the Health Act and making changes to allow more private health care, quite frankly. I mean, this is the Holy Grail of libertarian sort of right-wing politics. Again, while I need to read this bill more closely to see where there are elements to potentially buttress private health care, again there's always this longing look that Conservative governments give to our Health Act, looking for ways to alter it. It always raises my antenna to make sure that, you know, there's not a temptation to look for more private health care.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1, are there others? The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise on amendment RA1 today, and I must say in this Chamber that we have been witnessing since the beginning of the term of this UCP government what I would call A Nightmare on Law Street. Of course, I'm not a lawyer myself either, but what we do here in this Chamber as lawmakers is make laws. What has happened repeatedly as a result of legislation that this government has brought forward is that they have had to walk things back. I know that Bill 66, the amending bill that we're hoping to amend to not have it go forward, was a response to Bill 10, which after 23 days the Premier indicated to the public that he was going to seek changes, seek to make amendments to because of the huge outcry from the public, from academics, from the legal community, from those affected by the legislation in the health care community, from educators. It was society-wide.

When you think about it – I mean, so much has happened in the last year or so. But back in the initial days of the pandemic, when the government brought forward Bill 10 as a response to enable themselves to be able to govern in a way they thought might be necessary and brought forward what turned out to be very draconian measures in Bill 10, which ultimately were sought to be walked back under the Public Health Amendment Act, which we seek today to amend and not have read, the measures that were brought forward after 23 days, Mr. Speaker, brought forward such a hue and cry from members of the public that the Premier found it necessary to admit how flawed it was and say: well, we're going to change it. It was an incredibly damning moment in the eyes of the public, that this was not realized before the bill was brought to light, that this overreach was something that the public was not going to accept, even in the midst of a pandemic being used as an excuse by the government.

Mr. Speaker, the reason we're here, where we're at with respect to the Public Health Amendment Act and our amendment not to have it brought forward or proceed because of the lack of public consultation, is precisely born out of the lack of consultation, lack of wisdom, or perhaps the gamble that the government made when they brought in the initial Bill 10, that the Public Health Amendment Act sought to remedy. I can't help but wonder what the cabinet meetings were like when discussions were ongoing to see what they could perhaps get away with in the initial Bill 10 and whether or not the consequences of that were fully thought through when the decision was made to proceed.

After 23 days – 23 days; that's a little over three weeks – you know, the public typically, Mr. Speaker, has barely digested a piece of legislation. It's not something that commonly occurs in the public, when you have a huge groundswell of opposition to a piece of legislation. But in less than three weeks there was such a rancour that was caused by this initial Bill 10 that the Premier, after 23 days, decided that he'd better inform the public that changes were coming, that we were going to make sure that it was more palatable. Indeed, it took till this spring for those changes to be brought forward in the Public Health Amendment Act, and now, of course, we're saying that that consultation process that the government engaged in was insufficient and inadequate.

If one is to read the minority report of the select special committee that was struck to review the Public Health Act, it's a sad commentary on the functioning of democracy in this province. When the committee is not able to function, not allowed to perform, not allowed to bring forward members of the public or stakeholders such as the chief medical officer of health for proper questioning and consideration of views that she might bring forward, when the Official Opposition members of that committee are denied the opportunity to participate in a way that would allow them to fully vet the differing views, where the government's only modus

operandi during that committee was to water down any opposition that could be mounted, the public was further led to question exactly what the government was up to. You typically will cause a bill, a piece of legislation, to be reviewed before a committee to perhaps, hopefully, shed some light on it, to allow the public to be fully cognizant of what the intentions are of the government, yet with this particular committee the opposite was true.

5:30

I know that the select special committee was one that was struck in response to a perceived need by the government and the opposition to fully vet the overreaching powers of Bill 10 and have the Public Health Amendment Act properly sort out what limitations there should be. In fact, the committee did little to explore the shortcomings of that legislation, yet there were ample respondents who wanted to bring forward their views to it. They were denied, and the government members voted to limit the consultation. As a result, we are here today with amendments that, once again, haven't received the proper vetting, and we believe that they should be able to be vetted before the public in a much more comprehensive way than they have. Therefore, we are going to vote against having this bill go forward and that it not be read a second time by way of the amendment that we are debating this afternoon.

The whole Nightmare on Law Street, as I call it, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm not sure whether it's actually a serial TV program or whether we should title it as a full movie with never-ending sequels. It seems to me that this government seems to have no end in sight as to the mistakes that they are willing to make.

They seem to have to always walk back what they do, and it really begs the question as to what's happening within cabinet and within cabinet committees to allow decisions to be made that end up being so disastrous and so vehemently opposed by the public, whether it's tearing up agreements that are made with the doctors of this province and, of course, being sued as a result; whether it's hailing our nurses or our front-line health care workers as heroes until after the pandemic, of course, when the threat is hanging over their head that their jobs might not be there; whether it's telling packing plant workers that they are in a safe environment when it's well known that hundreds of their colleagues are being sickened by the workplace and that some of them are dying.

This amendment that we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, is a sentence and a paragraph of a chapter of a long nightmare on law street that continues to evolve in front of us, whether we're talking about our schools and our health care within our schools, and that's something that's particularly front and centre this afternoon, when we know that many of our students in this province are facing the prospect of looking at a computer screen for who knows how long because of the threat of the virus in their schools. That is a result of failed policies once again.

The vaccination rollout is another failed policy that we see this government making excuses for. You know, people are very willing to do everything possible, to go where they need to go to get the vaccination that they so rightly desire to protect themselves, protect their neighbours and their family, looking after each other and caring for each other. That's really what we are supposed to be doing not only within this Chamber but as a society, as members of this provincial population. That's not exactly what's happening with all of the policies that the provincial government has been bringing forward in every department, in my view, since they've been elected. It's a nightmare on law street that commentators like Don Braid really itemize, recently talking about many of the subjects that I've mentioned already and shaking his head, in literal terms, wondering just what in the world this government was thinking.

Another example of that, of course, is the curriculum rollout that happened recently. We have school boards every day adding to the numbers of school boards saying that they will not pilot this curriculum. They find it offensive. They find it deficient in so many ways that they can't as professionals even see themselves piloting it. Never mind the teachers; it's also the school administrators and the boards making decisions not to pilot the program. Where in the world did this decision to come forward with such a proposed curriculum come from? Like, who were they listening to? Who were they avoiding listening to? It's a continual pattern, Mr. Speaker, of failing to properly consult and truly listen and to go in a direction where the rest of the province clearly isn't headed.

I find that it's, you know, to their own detriment, but it's an unnecessary amount of damage that they're doing to this province as a result of heading off into the sunset on a pathway that they have no map for. Certainly, the majority of the population in this province is pretty loudly proclaiming right now, Mr. Speaker, that this government may think they know where they're going, but in the rest of the province the view of the majority is that they've lost their way, that they've totally lost their way, and the revolt is seen within their own caucus.

Individuals who signed the letter claiming that they disagreed with government policy regarding the COVID restriction: that individual group or, I would say, that opposition party within the government caucus is not the direction of the majority of the province. But, in fact, they are the majority of the rump of the right-wing flank of the UCP caucus, and that's the tail that's wagging the dog right now, Mr. Speaker. I think that that's what's happening across the province. We're ending up with real grave difficulty because the government is seeing a political narrative where they are forced to listen to a minority view within their own political spectrum, and that is how they are governing, because they rely upon that minority view to maintain power in the province. The results are clear. It's a nightmare in so many ways, whether it's doctors and nurses, the vaccination rollout, packing plants, school scandals. It ought to be addressed.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much to the hon. member for, I think, a very interesting survey of context as to where we are and how Bill 66 shows up like it does. I'm not sure if the hon. member was part of that committee or not in regard to what led to this Bill 66, but, you know, I'm starting to piece together some of the elements that brought us to where we are today.

One thing that I'm very curious about and concerned about in regard to this bill is that if it does meet a legal challenge or if it does meet a standard by which it were to be challenged on any particular part of this bill, especially, as I've said before, this idea of trying to recover costs for an individual that might have breached a law in regard to public health – I think a lot of the examples that we have top of mind, all of us, are in regard to the pandemic, right?

5:40

You know, again, I've been hearing part of a disturbing narrative over the last number of months, almost a year now, where this government and this Premier, particularly, are looking to blame individuals for any change in the level of contamination or of infection into the public. I see this bill, in some way, as an extension of that same attitude, where you're saying: okay; if someone has a house party or they open a church illegally, not only are we going to fine them and try to shut them down, but we're going to have

them pay the recovery cost for the police or all the other things. I mean, that's kind of what I'm reading into this, which unto itself has its own level of problem, like I've described to you before. But underneath that as well – and you can correct me if I'm wrong – I see that it is another way to plant this idea that it's individual Albertans that have caused the problem with an expanding COVID crisis in this province – right? – and that it's not the government's fault.

You know, it's this idea of absolution by saying: "Well, it's just bad behaviour. It's people having wild parties and so forth." We heard it even just as lately as a couple of days ago – right? – where they talked about a school that had to get shut down in, I think, Athabasca if I'm not mistaken. They said: "Yeah. It was because someone had a party, and that infected everybody." Well, maybe that's some part of the narrative of why these things are happening, but categorically, with the supports being in place that would allow smaller class sizes, would allow cleaning, would allow people to take time off with pay if they are sick, with proper education, with the MLAs representing those areas setting a proper example by not defying the health order – I mean, how ridiculous can that be? The place with the highest per capita infection rate is represented by one of the MLAs that said that we need to relax the rules.

Those are things that I believe that – again, it's a bit circuitous, my argument, but I think people can understand what I'm saying. By somehow implicitly blaming individuals and their behaviours – I mean, people have to be responsible – you are somehow putting in a tacit notion that it's not the government's fault, that, no, no, no, it's people's bad behaviour that's put us in this predicament right now. You know, this bill, which could be law, has some small element of that. I don't know if the hon. member has thought of that before, but I just was curious to know his thoughts, to see if I'm heading down the right path, because I want to make sure that I'm right, whether I'm going to vote for this thing or not.

The Speaker: The hon. member has about 30 seconds remaining should he choose to use it.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly would like to respond by saying that the hon. member brings up a very good point. What it makes me think about is what one would hope we see in a Premier as he or she leads the province through a very difficult time, and that is a measure of the depth of their belief that they have to bring everybody together to one place and not divide and allow for divisions to grow and fester, which end up causing bigger problems than they originally had.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1 are there others wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to RA1 on Bill 66, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2021. I think that my colleagues here today have done a considerably thorough job of outlining why Bill 66 should not proceed at this time, right? We know that this bill isn't about promoting public health. It's not about ensuring that we're doing the right things in the middle of a large public health emergency. Instead, we can see very clearly that Bill 66 is about cleaning up a political mess, the disaster of what we saw in Bill 10, which prompted, basically, full on revolt and lawsuits that forced a review committee to look at the Public Health Act and bring in amendments and do all this work.

Now we see the government bringing forward this bill, Bill 66, that changes things that weren't even addressed by the committee, that the committee didn't even do the work on. This government basically hasn't taken the time to ensure that the proper consultation would be completed, right? The government, we saw in committee, refused to allow the experts to come and present on the issues we

were worried about, that the opposition was worried about. The government caucus blocked the presentation of Dr. Hinshaw. They blocked the presentation of the experts that we requested.

Really, when we look at what the Public Health Act Review Committee did, it seems like not a single one of the suggestions in the opposition's minority report was considered, right? It becomes very clear that the government has not and is not seriously listening to Albertans and listening to the experts when we look at this. That's why it's so important that we go back and take Bill 66 to committee and say: we need proper consultation, we need proper work in terms of ensuring that the authorities that are granted by this bill make sense. We don't know that they make sense, right? We don't know that Bill 66 and the authorities that are moving forward with it make sense.

For example – and I know we've talked about this at quite a bit of length today already, but I want to reiterate – the government is bringing in the ability for Alberta Health Services to recover costs when they're enforcing public health orders, right? We know that this is not a hypothetical thing. Like, public health orders are being enforced right now, as we speak. We saw just a few days ago a massive rally and protest at GraceLife church, just outside of Edmonton here, that resulted in the enforcement action that we saw the Member for Peace River make a video against and speak out against here in Edmonton. He was in Edmonton when he made that video, of course. We've seen significant public outcry about this enforcement.

Now, under Bill 66 what the government is proposing is that those enforcement costs – for example, the costs of renting or moving the barricades that were used, the costs of having police officers responding; I know that RCMP was responding and local police as well. The cost of all of these things and then having health officers and health officials on-site: all these things could be recovered by Alberta Health Services, right? Those fine structures and those types of systems were not explored by the Public Health Act Review Committee. They were not explored by parliamentarians and were not consulted on with experts or stakeholders.

When we talk about these issues, we talk about the types of issues that, Mr. Speaker, we know the 17 UCP MLAs signed the letter about just last week. We know that UCP MLAs are very concerned about this and that government caucus MLAs are very concerned about this, yet they are allowing these changes to move forward without giving it proper consultation, without giving it proper thought, and without allowing the stakeholders to have their say. That's something that's pretty shocking, right? It's pretty shocking that these new authorities that are being given to government, which are quite significant changes in the powers – we know that we've seen, for example, fines used in the case of public health orders. We've seen – I think there was an unlawful house party not too long ago. The individual that was hosting was fined around \$1,000. But this could increase this quite significantly, right? These fines could go up to, in the case of the GraceLife church incident, tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars. We don't know what the final costs will be in many cases.

When we're talking about this issue of enforcement, when we're talking about this issue of these powers that are being granted to the government, powers that 17 members, 18, really, 18 members of the UCP, 18 members of the government caucus, have already issued a statement about just last week saying that these powers and these authorities seem to be overstepping, it's very concerning that those same 18 MLAs would stand in this place and rise in this place and speak to it and would then say that they want to have these powers move forward, that they want to have these authorities move forward. I think it's fairly concerning.

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It's fairly concerning that the ministry isn't sharing what type of revenues they expect this to provide. They aren't sharing the information around things like what the costs associated with enforcement actually are. They aren't sharing whether they consulted with people like the Bar Association or public health experts or Justice or police forces on what this would actually mean. None of this work that was supposed to be done at the Public Health Act Review Committee that the Public Health Act Review Committee would have been able to do and do the proper consultation on – it just wasn't done because we didn't know the government wanted to bring these changes in. We didn't know the government was interested in these changes.

Mr. Speaker, it's pretty disappointing because we know that the government severely overstepped its authority with Bill 10, right? When they brought Bill 10 in last spring, we know the government significantly overstepped their authority, and now they're trying to clean it up but, in the process of doing so, are bringing in new powers which we know at least 17, 18 UCP MLAs are opposed to as well. We know that significant portions of this Assembly, at least a quarter of the government caucus, almost half of all government backbenchers, and others are very concerned that these types of powers and the public health orders under these powers have not been sufficiently investigated, have not been sufficiently consulted on, have not sufficiently received public consultation.

When we look at the types of powers being brought in, when we look at how these enforcement orders are going to be used, when we look at the recovery costs of this, we don't even know if Alberta Health Services or the government has consulted with police forces, right? We don't even know if – for example, here in Edmonton, the GraceLife church again: we don't even know that the RCMP would be able to provide an itemized cost to Alberta Health Services to issue these recovery processes. We don't even know that Alberta Health Services compiles these types of costs in reports, right? We don't even know how much sending two, five, 10 health officials out costs. These are questions that could be answered if the Public Health Act Review Committee had known this was going to be coming and would have done this consultation.

So it's a little bit strange that the Superspreader 17 MLAs here, who have already shown significant concerns with the existing public health orders, would then allow this significant policy change, this significant change in direction, without saying: wait; we need to stop and do a consultation because we know that there was already – the government caucus as well as the opposition had significant concerns with Bill 10 when it was introduced last spring. We knew that it had constitutional issues. We knew that it severely overstepped on the authority of government.

Now we're seeing the same thing, where the government has not done the work, has not put in the time required, has not actually checked and made sure that stakeholders were on board, has not actually checked and talked to Albertans and talked to the people who are going to be most affected by this. It seems like this government has just willy-nilly taken the pen and decided they're going to bring in this new fine structure. That's something that's very disappointing, right?

It's very disappointing because if this was something that the government was not aware of, if the ramifications of bringing in these types of changes were not something the government was aware of, they certainly should be now, now that significant enforcement orders have been used in the last several days here in this province, of course, not that far from the House here as well, from this place that we're standing in right now, significant enforcement orders that have utilized resources not only from

Alberta Health Services but from municipal police forces and the RCMP, our federal police force, as well, that have utilized significant resources.

These types of changes should be very concerning. These types of changes should require significantly more review, and it's clear that the government understands that. It's clear the government understands that we need review for Public Health Act amendments because they created a committee for that not that long ago, after they significantly overstepped. After the UCP significantly overstepped with Bill 10, that caused significant turmoil within their own ranks – and, of course, the opposition had warned them. We had warned them that this was going to be a problem. After that, they realized that they needed to clean it up, bring in the Public Health Act Review Committee. We came forward. The opposition presented a bunch of changes. None of those are represented here. The government blocked the experts from coming to committee. The government blocked Dr. Hinshaw from going to committee. The government blocked many of the changes, and not a single one of the opposition's minority report recommendations is included.

But now we look at that and we see that, basically, these changes that are being brought forward weren't involved in that consultation. So the government understands that consultation is important. The government understands that when you're making these substantive changes to the Public Health Act, you do need to make consultation – that's why they struck the committee immediately – yet they completely neglected to consult on the significant and substantive policy change, which is to recover costs during enforcement actions, right? How, on one hand, can the government say, "Consultation is important; we know we need to consult; that's why we're creating a committee," and then at that committee not only block the experts from speaking, block Dr. Hinshaw from speaking, block I believe it was over 20 experts that the opposition requested we speak to from speaking but then also bring in changes that they didn't even bring up in committee, bring in changes that weren't even considered at the committee level?

To on one hand say, "The government wants to consult on these significant changes to the Public Health Act," on one hand to say, "We want to fix the mistakes that the government made with Bill 10; we want to fix the mistakes when this government significantly overstepped their authority" – and that's why they struck that committee. On one hand, the government tries to do this; on the other, they completely – completely – fail to do any of the work that they just said they wanted to do, right? It's something that is completely shocking, that the government would try to speak out of both sides of their mouths like that, Mr. Speaker.

I think that it's pretty disappointing. I think that it's pretty disappointing because we know that members of the government caucus agree with us. How do we know that members of the government caucus agree with us? Well, at least 17 of them signed a letter to that effect, that they agree that there are significant concerns with the public health orders and how they should be used. It's shocking that members of the government who agree with us would sit here and move to move forward with Bill 66.

That's why we need to stop this right now and go back and do proper consultation. That's why we need to look at this reasoned amendment and say: actually, this makes sense. Public consultation can fix some of these issues before they become problems, right? We know that the government didn't do this with Bill 10 – they didn't do it properly with Bill 10 – and that's what's brought us to this position where we have this very problematic piece of legislation that is now cleaning up that mess, right?

We know that we saw, again, the Member for Peace River already talk about how he believed that the enforcement actions that were done at GraceLife church – we saw him do a video on the very steps

of this building around the enforcement actions for GraceLife church. I would ask that member to rise in this place and explain how he feels about AHS using this new power, that the government is granting, to recover the cost of that enforcement action. I believe that the Member for Peace River disagrees that the enforcement actions should happen at all, but now he's going to vote in favour, I presume, Mr. Speaker – I wouldn't speak on behalf of any other member here, of course. I presume that, like other government members, he is likely to vote in favour of granting these powers to the government on something he already created a video and spoke out against, right?

It simply is unbelievable. It's unbelievable that government members have this cognitive dissonance, that on one hand they can say, "We disagree with the public health orders" – they disagree

with enforcing the public health orders – and then on the other hand they would vote in favour of granting more power that wasn't consulted on, wasn't reviewed, and that parliamentarians in this place did not even go to committee and talk about when we had a committee specifically to review these types of changes. That's the type of really shocking thing.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to stop this bill. We need to go back, and we need to talk to the public about it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the timing of the conclusion of that speech is near perfect because pursuant to Standing Order 8(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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