



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 25, 2021

Day 103

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 3

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Sigurdson, R.J.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
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Dach
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Loewen
Singh
Turton
Yaseen

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please remain standing for the playing of our national anthem. In observation of the COVID-19 public health guidelines, please refrain from singing aloud in the language of your choice.

Recording:

O Canada, our home and native land!
 True patriot love in all of us command.
 Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
 Il sait porter la croix!
 Ton histoire est une épopée
 Des plus brillants exploits.
 God keep our land glorious and free!
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Members' Statements

Legislative Assembly Break and School Reopening

Ms Hoffman: Welcome back. What was supposed to be an engagement of one week in local riding initiatives to support constituents turned into over a month of the current Premier and his government hiding: hiding from doing the important work of passing bills to help Albertans during the pandemic, hiding from the scrutiny of the media, hiding from the questions of the Official Opposition, and the Premier hiding from his own formerly United Conservative caucus.

Members of the Assembly should have been at work to make schools safer, but kids were sent home to do emergency remote home learning yet again, and the government went into hiding. The current Premier and the Education minister said that everything was fine in schools, that things were going great, but then they closed them province-wide, all grades, for the third time. Many students have been forced to isolate even more times because this government failed to implement the recommendations we passed, recommendations that we proposed on the feedback of Albertans and research from other jurisdictions. The current government failed, and schools closed yet again. In the middle of a pandemic they've actually cut the number of teachers and educational assistants by more than 2,000, and they've also cut supports in schools for mental health and students with disabilities.

What the current government has done is cold, cruel, and even dangerous, and it's students, staff, and families who have been left to pay the price. I want students to be in school, our leader and our party want students in school, and it's the job of the government to make sure that that happens safely. This UCP government has failed. It's failed to fulfill the most basic responsibilities to keep children and adolescents safe in school and learning. Now parents are left to wait and see yet again.

It's been over a month since we sat in this place to consider laws or government policy, so welcome back to the government, that's been in hiding. Please show Albertans that you've taken this time out to reflect, and show them today that you will do something, anything, to make schools safer.

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

Alberta Rural Health Week

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise and recognize Alberta Rural Health Week, taking place from May 24 to 28. This special week is a time to celebrate the contributions of rural health care providers and community volunteers, who help keep health care close to home. The skills and practices of rural health providers enhance the quality of life in rural Alberta. They provide excellent health care to patients, who are often friends and neighbours who have been in the community for years. The difference their compassionate care makes in the lives of rural Albertans and of those in my riding of Drumheller-Stettler cannot be overstated.

These providers have special relationships with their community, and patients have confidence knowing their health stories are personally known. Rural health providers are also integral participants in community life. In their spare time they can be found with their children at the hockey rink, volunteering at local events, and building a stronger community. Particularly during these difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic, rural health providers are true heroes who are going above and beyond. They are dedicated to improving rural Albertans' health and well-being and continue to make tremendous personal sacrifices to help fight COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Rural Health Week is also an opportunity to say thank you to the local volunteers who support health care and health care providers in their communities. Whether it's volunteering on hospital wards and foundations, raising money through fundraising events, or being on local committees to attract new health care providers to their communities, these volunteers work behind the scenes to contribute to the fabric of rural life. On behalf of Alberta's government I thank rural health care providers and community volunteers for their contributions to improve the quality of life in rural Alberta. During this special week I also encourage my fellow rural Albertans to give a shout-out to the health professionals in their area and to remember to use #ruralhealthmatters.

Thank you.

Anti-Semitism

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I must rise today to speak about anti-Semitism in our society. In fact, we should all be saddened that in Alberta, in Canada in 2021 anti-Semitism still exists and pervades within our borders. This Chamber well knows that following the horrors of the Holocaust, Canada and our allies around the world committed ourselves to a sacred vow captured by just two words: never again. In my mind, this was a commitment not only to never again allow the horrors of the Shoah to take place but to never again allow the poisonous hatred of anti-Semitism. It should never be ignored, wherever it raises its ugly head.

Unfortunately, in the past few weeks we have seen this hatred manifest itself from the streets of Edmonton and Calgary to those of many Canadian cities and many more places around the world. We've seen violence against our Jewish neighbours. We've seen virulent messages of hate. In one horrifying incident here in Edmonton it was reported that a group of people were driving around one neighbourhood asking residents if any Jews live here. Mr. Speaker, we must speak out against this without equivocation. We must condemn this hatred and affirm that it will not be tolerated in Alberta and Canada. Our Jewish friends and neighbours are living in fear. This cannot be allowed. We must stand in unflinching solidarity with them. When it comes to anti-Semitism, we must honour the spirit of those words: never again.

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

Premier's Remarks on COVID-19 Response

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, the long weekend marked the end of three weeks during which the Premier decided that it was too dangerous for him to show up in the Legislature, weeks during which front-line health care workers continued to show up and fight to support the health and save the lives of Albertans, to deal with the results of the poor decisions this Premier and the government have made. They supported and comforted the many Albertans who lost their lives and worked overtime and extra shifts to support the hundreds who've been hospitalized and admitted to ICU, younger Albertans in their 20s, 30s, and 40s infected with COVID and COVID variants that left them sicker and needing more drastic interventions, compounded by the standard long weekend bump in traumas and acute medical issues.

But from the comfort of his long weekend, what was the Premier's response? Did he recognize the pressures on these workers, our last line of health defence? Did he applaud their efforts? Did he express sympathy for Albertans who spent their long weekend in a hospital bed or at home suffering from the ongoing impacts of the variants he waited weeks to take action on? No. The Premier of Alberta took to social media to pat himself on the back for his successful strategy. He's proud, Mr. Speaker, that by continually acting last and acting least, he allowed Alberta to have the worst COVID case rates in North America. Apparently, that was his plan. He apparently intended to push every health care worker to the brink, to exhaust them physically, mentally, and emotionally, leaving them susceptible to long-term impacts, including potentially PTSD. In his post he applauded himself for the fact that "the people that are getting ill and hospitalized now are overall younger and without compromising health conditions."

Well, Premier, for hundreds of them that's no longer true. Studies show that about one-third of them will end up with long COVID, ongoing and, for some, debilitating impacts on their health. Premier, you have nothing to be proud of. Your so-called strategy has been a failure. You can try to rewrite the record, but the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who have been forced to pay the price for your lack of leadership will remember. That is your legacy.

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

1:40

Racism Prevention

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I became aware of a heinous act committed against a young Sikh boy. This boy was confronted, pinned down, and had his hair cut by a bully. What a disgusting act for someone to commit against a young and helpless boy. While I don't know the specifics, it appeared that this boy was targeted merely because he looked different. Bullying is never tolerated, especially when it is informed by a racist sentiment. Frankly, that's what makes this act even more disgusting, the racial targeting of this action. As we speak to condemn racism in all forms, let this event serve as another reminder that bullying and racism of any kind will never be tolerated.

As Albertans, Canadians, and human beings we must remember that what makes each of us unique is what is in our hearts. It is compassion, courage, kindness, and overall character that define each man, woman, child, and human being in this world. We must never forget that we all ought to be judged on our character, not on the way we look or appear to one another. Anything less is to perpetuate a demeaning attitude that looks down upon those that

look, sound, or are different than the norm. This is how and where racism and the hatred for others purely on that identity start. I love this province, I love this country, but we cannot let events like this stand, no matter where racism occurs.

Thank you to the Dashmesh Culture Centre for bringing this tragic episode to light. We must and will do everything to stop racial bullying.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Early Childhood Educators

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, May 21 was Early Childhood Educator Day. It's a day to recognize the critical role early childhood educators play in the development of our children. They are essential resources for families to access early supports and loving, play-based learning environments. As this pandemic has highlighted, early childhood educators are essential for working parents and to keep our economy moving. But it's not enough to simply express our thanks; we must acknowledge that this workforce is in crisis.

Despite taking on additional responsibilities during the pandemic, including health and cleaning protocols, keeping children and families feeling safe, and worrying about their own health and safety and that of their families, the UCP is fundamentally letting these critical workers down. Alberta has lost more than 3,000 early childhood educators in the past year. Despite empty statements from the minister that she values educators, she decided that more than a quarter of them were ineligible for the critical worker benefit. During the third wave of this pandemic the number of outbreaks in child care has risen at an alarming rate, but the UCP has refused to provide rapid testing or any additional supports for PPE or staffing, and they ended the \$25-per-day child care program, which included wage supports and professional development. This is the same Minister of Children's Services who claimed that a minimum wage of \$15 per hour was too much for early childhood educators.

The UCP's continued rejection of a publicly funded, universal, affordable child care system shows that they want to keep pitting the interests of working women against the women who work in child care. Without public funding, it's impossible to lower fees without keeping wages for early childhood educators painfully low. Well-supported, well-compensated professional early learning and child care educators are the key to quality early learning. It's why the NDP has called for a long-term workforce strategy for this sector.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the early childhood educators in my family's life: Isabel, Paige, Harpeet, Navnit, Peggy, Belinda, and Roxy. But these women and all early childhood educators deserve more than thanks; they deserve to be recognized as professionals who are critical to our children, our families, and our economy.

Travel and Tourism in Alberta

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, this past weekend was the May long weekend. In Canada it is the unofficial start of summer. In Alberta it is known as the last week for snowfall warnings and the beginning of freak hailstorm season. While the official start of summer is weeks away, I know that my constituency was full of people this weekend in RVs and with OHVs, enjoying the great outdoors. In Alberta we have so many sites and opportunities to take in that make this province an optimal tourism destination.

As the parliamentary secretary for small business and tourism I want to acknowledge that this week is Tourism Week. Not only is it Tourism Week; it is national RV and Camping Week as well. As

a whole, the tourism sector contributed 6 and a half billion dollars to Alberta's GDP in 2019. The RV and camping sector contributed \$930 million to Alberta's GDP in 2014.

The visitor economy is a key component in Alberta's quest to diversify our economy and create jobs. During this week we focus on our strategy to make Alberta a tourism destination for many years to come. As the MLA for West Yellowhead I have to share that my constituency has the best all-around tourism experiences in the province, whether people are looking for the picturesque mountain views found in Jasper, Hinton, or Grande Cache or looking to enjoy quad and sled trails in Edson, Hinton, or Whitecourt. West Yellowhead has skiing, hunting, fishing, camping, indigenous tourism, and many more attractive tourism experiences.

Tourism opportunities abound across our beautiful province. Banff and Lake Louise have some of the best ski hills in the world, Calgary hosts the iconic Calgary Stampede, Drumheller has the Royal Tyrrell Museum, and Fort Macleod has an indigenous heritage site called Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. With these incredible tourist attractions along with countless others and coupled with the leadership from the Minister of JEI along with the vision of Travel Alberta and the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta, our province is well positioned to meet our goal of doubling our tourism sector in 10 years. I hope that this week, being Tourism Week and national RV and camping week, we'll all be planning our summer trips to enjoy as many of these tourism opportunities as possible.

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

United Conservative Party Principles and Policies

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a party the United Conservatives stand on the following principles: a robust civil society made up of free individuals, strong families, and voluntary associations; freedom of speech, worship, and assembly; affirming the family as a building block of society and the means by which citizens pass on their values and beliefs and ensuring that families are protected from intrusion by government; economic freedom in a market economy, which encourages the creation of wealth through free enterprise and protection of the right to own, enjoy, and exchange property; limited government, including all levels of taxation to help generate economic growth while allowing Albertans to enjoy the fruits of their own labour; fiscal responsibility, including balanced budgets, debt reduction, and respect for taxpayers' money; and protecting public safety as a primary responsibility of government.

A few weeks ago I received a letter from a 17-year-old United Conservative supporter named Kristin Stacy. Kristin wrote to me in a very well-written letter, detailing her past support for our party and how she views the direction we're heading as government. What made this letter so remarkable was not that it sang our every praise; rather, it raised a number of concerns, calling us to account. However, you could tell that these were the words of a young woman who genuinely cared about her government, the party she volunteered for, and especially the fundamental beliefs she holds.

One section of her letter detailed the importance of personal responsibility and the role Alberta's government has played in this ongoing pandemic. While Alberta's government will prioritize public safety and we as the government party will stay true to those principles, we also respect the personal freedoms of all Albertans. Letters of encouragement like these from students and youth across the province serve as a humbling reminder that no matter how far you go in politics, we are accountable to our constituents. Our youth

can have a voice by learning, asking questions, and respectfully engaging in debate and policy development.

I would like to thank Kristin for her thoughtful letter, and I encourage all students and youth across Alberta to engage, learn the true impacts of principles and policies, and let their voices be heard. Maybe one day, too, they could be standing here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Roadside Development Permits

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A few months ago I heard from constituents who were opening a new business. They had been waiting for weeks for governmental response on a roadside development permit to simply hang their new sign outside the building. It had been three weeks since they had sent their application in, and they were told that it could take another three to five weeks before getting approval back. Unfortunately, this situation is not uncommon for businesses in rural communities. Towns, villages, and hamlets have major highways running through them. Technically, any development within 800 metres of the centre line of a provincial highway requires a transportation permit, sometimes covering the entire community.

In 2020 there were 4,820 development permits issued across southern, central, and northern regions of the province. My riding and the rest of the region made up 23.5 per cent of those permits, some as simple as changing a sign on an existing building or building a fence five blocks off main street. In order to better serve our constituents, there has to be a better process that works with business owners and property owners, not against them. According to Alberta Transportation within my constituency the average turnaround period for these applications in 2020 was 24 days. Over the last few months it's increased to 29 days. This is just the average, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, there are examples of this taking almost two months to complete during a very short construction season.

I'm happy to hear that the Ministry of Transportation is looking into this process to make the permit application process and permission process easier and reduce red tape. I recommend exemptions for specific types of developments as many of these permits are one-day, sometimes one-afternoon jobs that should not require two months of waiting.

On a side note I would like to thank the minister and his department for their work that fast-tracked approvals for recent patio development requests made across the province. As government we made it one of our top priorities to reduce red tape around issues like this, and this is a great example of the quick work that can be done. Unfortunately, those lower restrictions were short lived, and we will have to reinstate them. This is an issue that has some very frustrating repercussions for our constituents. I look forward to working with the minister on this issue further.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Paid Sick Leave during COVID-19 Pandemic

Ms Notley: Quote: job-killing policy. Mr. Speaker, this is how the Premier describes paid sick leave or, more accurately, the ability

for working people to recover from illness and protect their co-workers while still paying rent and putting food on the table. It seems this Premier only cares for some lives and some livelihoods. It's also total misdirection. He knows very well that our proposal does not have employers cover the cost but, rather, Ottawa and the province. No more excuses. Why won't the Premier consider a government-funded paid sick leave program to protect hard-working Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we do effectively have such a program in place. We were the first province to put in place cash support for people who become sick and need to self-isolate in addition to free room and board. It's a two-week package that has a monetary and nonmonetary value of about \$2,000 in addition to the thousand dollars that workers can get from the federal government critical worker sickness benefit. That's \$3,000 in support over a two-week period. I was responding in that quote to a reporter who was suggesting that we impose new costs on employers, which would result in the loss of tens of thousands of jobs.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows that what he's talking about does not apply to most people.

Now, Nova Scotia passed paid sick leave. So did B.C., Manitoba. Even Doug Ford got it done. Here's Calgary Chamber president, Murray Sigler, quote: ensuring that employees can stay home when sick is an important way we can not only protect our employees but help curb the spread of COVID, and it goes hand in hand with protecting the economy. Put another way, saving lives is saving jobs. Every other Canadian understands this. Why doesn't the Premier?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. the Leader of the Opposition could not be more wrong. In fact, not only does the isolation payment and housing and food support include all people who are sick with COVID; it also includes people who are close contacts. Anybody who tests positive for COVID has to self-isolate. They can do so at taxpayers' support with a package worth \$2,000 in addition to the thousand dollars that the federal government is providing. Alberta has the most generous arrangement in the whole country.

Ms Notley: Facts are just not correct.

It is okay, though, for this Premier and his caucus to get paid sick leave when they need it but not regular front-line workers. Studies show that low-income workers are the most likely to not have paid sick leave days; they're also the most likely to get COVID and end up in the hospital. Evidence from Ontario suggests that paid sick leave actually reduces cases by one half. Mr. Speaker, if the Premier has a better plan than our proposal other than doing nothing, which is where we're at now, why won't he agree to a debate on it in this House this afternoon?

Mr. Kenney: Well, it seems to me we're having one right now, Mr. Speaker. Again the Leader of the Opposition is entirely wrong. Front-line workers, for example, nurses and people in the health care system, have full access to paid sick leave. This government did amend legislation a year ago to provide for a work-protected period of time off for workers who need it. We encourage employers to be as generous as possible. But the government on top of all of that is offering a two-week package worth \$2,000 in support in addition to the federal thousand dollars of support. That's significant support for people who do get sick or become close contacts of someone positive.

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

Support for Business

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been hit hard: 200,000 Albertans out of work, and this month we led the country in the highest jump in bankruptcies. Albertans need jobs, yet the Premier didn't even bother to defend jobs at stake on line 5. Now his only plan is a wage subsidy, half of which is funded by his good friend the Prime Minister, that won't offset a tenth of what's been lost. Albertans want to know: when will the Premier have a real plan to get to work on jobs and the economy, or is this it?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, line 5: I think the Leader of the Opposition just discovered what it is. I was in Michigan meeting with state legislators, union leaders, business leaders in the fall of 2019. I was meeting with the governor of Ohio. I met with eight governors in Washington on precisely this issue in January of 2020 while the NDP, as usual, was asleep at the switch. But you know what Gretchen Whitmer and the leader of the NDP have in common? They're both against pipelines.

Ms Notley: The one person he didn't meet with was Gretchen.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, this Premier has been so busy fighting with his own caucus to save his job that he hasn't been able to focus on any other ones. Last week we stood with small-business owners who are still waiting for the help promised by this Premier under SMERG. One owner has been waiting since November. Others were told to wait at least two more months. That's not the speed of business. To the Premier: why is your job the subject of an all-day caucus meeting while these business owners and the jobs they create can't even get five minutes on the agenda?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again completely false. We've delivered about \$700 million in direct cash support to small businesses on the SMERG payments alone in addition to several hundred million dollars in abatements for things like the hotel tax, the WCB premiums, the most generous package altogether in the country on a relative basis. We've committed to another \$350 million, with processing times of about 10 days. When she talks about two months, that's a complete fantasy.

Ms Notley: Well, the Premier might want to tell hard-working job creators that they're fantasizing, but they see what's in their bank account each and every day, and it's not a cheque from this government. They can't get these folks on the phone. They can't find out if they've been approved or not approved. Some of them are waiting since November. That was your last shutdown. They're now on your third shutdown. They need you to show up for work. When will you pick up the phone?

The Speaker: I urge the Leader of the Opposition to pose her questions through the chair.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that about 5 per cent of businesses in Alberta currently are significantly suspended in their operations because of public health orders. The reality is this: if the NDP had been in office, we would see tens and tens of thousands more businesses that would have been shut down throughout the entire year. How dare the party of hard and brutal lockdowns suddenly pretend that it's the defender of small businesses, who have been struggling through the past year?

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

Indigenous Content in Educational Curriculum

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the history of indigenous people in our education system has been nothing short of heinous, and that is why Lubicon Lake Chief Billy Joe Laboucan's words today were so deeply concerning. He says that the government of Alberta betrayed him by only showing him a page and a half of the draft curriculum before asking for his support. Quote: it made me look like the token Indian. End quote. Premier, in the age of truth and reconciliation this is unacceptable. Will you apologize to Chief Laboucan on behalf of the government of Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we are proud of the draft curriculum, which in the draft social studies K to 6 curriculum includes significantly more content about indigenous history and the indigenous reality of our society today than any curriculum in Alberta history. There were extensive consultations with First Nations leaders, with First Nations elders. But, more importantly, this is a curriculum that gets back to basics for math, numeracy, literacy, and reading skills as well as civic literacy with respect to social studies.

Ms Notley: That's some tone deaf stuff, Mr. Speaker.

Chief Laboucan's words were echoed by Betty Letendre, a Métis residential school survivor, who was asked to review the draft last year. She said that the government handed indigenous elders and advisers hundreds of pages of documents and then gave them just six days to respond. That's the very definition of tokenism. Chief Wilton Littlechild, who the government loves to quote ad nauseum, now says that he hasn't seen the curriculum and he won't comment on it. Premier, this is serious. Why are you using indigenous leaders as political cover for your broken curriculum?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, a characteristically disgusting framing of the question from the leader of the NDP, who never misses an opportunity to seek to divide and mislead. She just said a moment ago that we only provided a page and a half of information, and then she said that we provided hundreds of pages of information. It just shows you that the NDP isn't credible when it comes to dividing and the politics of fear and smear. [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: I was quoting different people because I listen to them.

Treaty 6 chiefs said that the curriculum "perpetuates rather than addresses systemic racism." Métis Nation president Audrey Poitras says that it "effectively eliminates the voice and history of the Métis Peoples in Alberta." Athabasca Chipewyan Chief Allan Adam says that it does not fulfill the commitments to truth and reconciliation and must be rescinded. The decision by this Premier to continue just right now in this House to ignore these voices perpetuates a century of discrimination. Premier, hear their words. Pull back your draft.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds more references to indigenous history, including injustices committed against First Nations, in this curriculum. That's not an opinion. It's a fact. It's not a lecture. It is simply a fact. Now, if people have constructive input about how further to improve the draft curriculum, the government is all ears and quite willing to take onboard all perspectives in terms of constructive criticism. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Education Policies

Ms Hoffman: Alberta teachers spent their weekend fighting for public education and took a stand against the Minister of Education. Ninety-nine per cent of teachers attending the Annual Representative Assembly voted in favour of a motion of no confidence in the Minister of Education. One delegate said, quote: this is not about the UCP; this is about competent leadership. Premier, these teachers were elected by their peers to represent teachers. How can the Premier possibly support the minister when 99 per cent of Alberta teachers say that they don't?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, thankfully, this is a democracy and not a unionocracy. We make decisions democratically at elections. The government decides who ministers are, not special-interest groups and not unions. Albertans had a choice about who would be their Minister of Education in the last election, and they fired the NDP.

Ms Hoffman: I expected the government to attack these teachers rather than work with them because that's what they've done all along. Teachers watched in horror as this government cut protections for students, rolled out a curriculum that teachers were never consulted on, and refused to provide necessary supports during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, this government used the pandemic to fire education staff. The Premier and staff claim that the minister still has the support of teachers who weren't part of the May long weekend meeting. That is ridiculous, Premier, but let's put that to the test. Will the Premier conduct a survey asking all Alberta teachers whether or not they support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the government is accountable to Albertans, not to a union, not to the NDP, not to a union that spent \$2 million trying to re-elect the NDP in the last election. This government is keeping its commitment to renew the curriculum, with a focus on basics like numeracy and literacy as well as civic literacy as opposed to the torqued political agenda that the NDP wants to drive into our school system.

Ms Hoffman: The Premier refuses to do the right thing. Ninety-nine per cent of teachers have no confidence; 91 per cent of teachers rejected the minister's bogus curriculum taught by 92 per cent of school boards that flat out refuse to pilot any portion of it; 95 per cent of principals also reject the curriculum; 100 per cent said that they won't pilot any of it or all of it. As well, parents have been struggling to teach their kids at home because the government refuses to do anything to help them during the pandemic. Premier, enough is enough. Fire the Education minister today, and put someone in who's actually going to support public education and children.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, every single word of that preamble was false. The NDP presided over an effort to inject left-wing politics into the school curriculum, and Albertans said no in resounding numbers to that. They want a curriculum that focuses on the basics of literacy and numeracy as well as a balanced approach to civic literacy. That's exactly what we're developing, together with input. Thank goodness the NDP weren't in office the past year because the schools never would have been open, not for one single day.

Jobs Now Program

Mr. Yaseen: Mr. Speaker, this past year the COVID-19 pandemic has caused tough economic times and high unemployment rates,

which have impacted households and businesses across every region of this province. Last week the government launched their much-anticipated \$370 million jobs now program. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: when will employers be able to apply to this program, and how long is the funding available?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my hon. colleague for the question. I was very pleased to announce, with the Premier and my colleagues, a historic program, the Alberta jobs now program; \$370 million to support Alberta businesses and to support Albertans in getting back to work. We opened the first intake, the portal, so employers will be able to apply as of May 20. That was last week. Applications for the first intake will be – they can apply until August 31. There'll be a second application intake September 15 to the end of December, and a third one will be announced shortly.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-North.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that this program is designed to help reduce the cost of hiring and training and to get Albertans back to work and further given that the private-sector businesses and nonprofit organizations across all industries will be eligible to apply for Alberta jobs now, to the Minister of Labour and Immigration: how much funding can an individual apply for or receive through this program, and how many jobs will it create?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for the question. Employers will get a grant that covers 25 per cent of the employee's wages or salary, which can be used for a wage subsidy, training, or both. These are the costs for a 52-week period to a maximum of \$25,000 per employee. Employers will get half of this payment three months after they confirm that they have hired someone after they've made the application and the other half after a year, or 52 weeks. Employers can also choose to take the full allotment at the end of 52 weeks, and employers can use this funding for up to 20 positions per intake.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that I have heard from many businesses and individuals in my riding who are facing tough times and are ready to take advantage of this new program and further given that they want to start planning what options are available for their businesses and their employees, can the same minister please advise what employers are able to use the funding for and how the government is ensuring that the funding is being used for the purpose it was intended?

Mr. Copping: Thanks again to my hon. colleague for the question. Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased that in addition to the Premier and my other colleagues being there for the announcements, we had the Alberta chamber Edmonton and the Calgary Chamber of commerce there with us. They were with us there because we consulted with employers to get this program right, and what we heard is that employers needed flexibility. They needed flexibility to perhaps use the money for training, so people going from one industry to another, one sector to another, needing to be retrained. In some cases they need money to off-set the costs of hiring, and this

program provides for both. They can use it either for training or for wage subsidy.

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

Premier's Remarks on COVID-19 Response

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This third wave of COVID-19 has impacted the lives of so many Albertans. Our active cases have reached a record high. There were a record number of people in our ICUs, but somehow the Premier decided that he needed to make this grave human suffering into a bragging opportunity. He created a graphic, jumped on social media to claim that his strategy was working because most of the hospitalizations and ICU cases are now people under the age of 50. My question to him is simple. Is he seriously telling Albertans fighting for their lives in hospitals that his strategy worked? What about all of the people whose loved ones died?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised to see the hon. member again try to twist facts and twist the words of those on this side. Of course, our hearts go out to all those who lost loved ones during the pandemic. It's why we have focused on lives throughout this pandemic and focused on public health measures that are going to do the best that can be done to be able to target the spread of COVID throughout our communities and, as well, be able to work with AHS to make sure they have all the resources that they need to be able to expand their capacity throughout the province and to be able to provide the resources to make sure that everybody who needs critical care gets it in this province.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans can read and given that this Premier claimed to have defeated COVID in the first wave only to run Alberta headfirst into the second and given that despite constant warnings and urges to take action, this Premier plugged his ears and fell backwards into the third wave, which led Alberta to have the highest rate of COVID-19 cases in North America, to the Premier: was it always your strategy to lead the continent in COVID-19 cases? Don't you recognize that the prolonged third wave cost more lives and prolonged our economic suffering?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, thanks to the amazing diligence of Albertans, the number of active cases in our province has gone down by 50 per cent in the last two weeks alone. Instead of celebrating that and thanking Albertans, what does the NDP seek to do? Fear and smear. Of course, every death from this or any other cause is tragic, especially for those who loved the person who has passed away, but we can be proud of the diligence of Albertans, which has resulted in Alberta having a COVID fatality rate lower than the other large Canadian provinces.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I will celebrate what Albertans have done but I will hold this government to account for forcing them to have to do it and given that it tells Albertans everything they need to know about the values of this Premier when he boasts about younger people being hospitalized with COVID-19 and given that he once claimed that kids barely ever get COVID-19 and that the effects on them were minimal but that has been disproven by countless experts in medicine and given that we've only begun to understand the long-term effects of

COVID-19 on young people and Albertans, to the Premier: will you apologize for suggesting that kids weren't at risk of COVID, for your horrific post this weekend, and for failing to manage this pandemic from day one?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I don't apologize for a moment for making Albertans aware that COVID can affect younger people. That was exactly the point I was making last week. Now that we have inoculated – and, by the way, it's odd that the NDP didn't mention that we have by far the highest rate of double-dosing of vaccines in Canada, of full vaccination, focused on the most vulnerable, which is one of the reasons our death rate is lower. It's one of the reasons the average age of hospitalization is lower. While he continues to try to frighten parents with children, I must report that we have, thankfully, not experienced a single confirmed fatality from COVID-19 of anybody under the age of 20 in Alberta.

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

Paid Sick Leave during COVID-19 Pandemic (continued)

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Late last week I sent a bill that we have drafted that would give every single Alberta worker 10 days of paid sick leave for the duration of this pandemic, and I e-mailed it to all 87 members of this Legislature. My first question is very simple. To the minister of labour: did you review the bill we drafted, and will you agree to work with me to bring forward formal legislation to give paid sick leave to every Alberta worker? Yes or no?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question and the suggestion. Throughout the pandemic Alberta's government has been working hard to support Alberta workers, Alberta employers, in fact all Albertans through this. We put in place, to be able to protect workers, job-protected leave if they had COVID-19 or if they had to look after someone who had COVID-19, and we also put in place a program to be able to provide funding for employees who had to isolate themselves while the federal government put this in. We are continuing to look at supports and will put them in as needed.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that job-protected leave doesn't pay anyone's bills and given that the two weeks of emergency isolation doesn't mean that your mortgage isn't due and given that the minister was willing to work with me to introduce three hours of paid vaccination leave for workers during the pandemic and given that that spirit of bipartisanship appears to be gone and that the government would rather misrepresent our proposal for paid sick leave by assuming that it would be job killing, to the minister: will you admit that our proposal supports workers and does not add costs to employers, or if not, will you at least admit that you're not willing to have a reasoned debate?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Premier already answered the question. The Premier answered a question in regard to employer-paid sick leave post the pandemic, so I wish that the members of the opposition would quit misrepresenting that fact. As indicated by the Premier already, our government has supports in place for workers, in addition to not only job-protected leave, free-of-charge 14-day stays in provincial isolation hotels complete with culturally appropriate food, \$625 of financial assistance upon

completion of their stay, and other supports, over \$2,000 plus the federal support. We are supporting Alberta workers.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that the government is misrepresenting these hotel stays as being helpful, which they are not when a worker gets up and is sick and has to make that decision, and given that paid sick leave is being compensated by provincial and federal governments in Ontario and B.C., so we know it can be done, and given that across Canada two Conservative, one Liberal, and one NDP governments have already done this to help their citizens and given that paid sick leave is not a partisan issue – it's a life-saving one – to the minister: can you explain why saving lives on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic and offering a real solution isn't your priority?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on supporting workers and supporting employers as well through this pandemic. Our province was the first in western Canada to offer rapid antigen testing kits to all chambers of commerce province-wide to help identify presymptomatic and asymptomatic cases, and interested businesses and not-for-profit organizations can apply to receive rapid testing kits directly from their local chamber of commerce. As the pandemic evolves and as we continue to work through the end of widespread vaccinations and are very pleased to see that vaccinations continue to increase to well over 50 per cent of the eligible population – plus, we're seeing numbers come down – we will assess the need on an ongoing basis and provide supports as required.

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

Cystic Fibrosis Treatment

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are 600 Albertans with cystic fibrosis, a progressive and fatal lung disease. Many of these patients are hopeful to receive life-saving modulators, which can dramatically slow the progression of the disease. Trikafta is one that's expected to be approved by Health Canada by June 28. Trikafta can treat up to 90 per cent of our cystic fibrosis patients and get them off provincially funded transplant lists as their condition improves. To the Minister of Health: can you commit to listing Trikafta and similar modulators to the provincial formulary once Health Canada approvals are complete?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like other provinces Alberta relies on the guidance of national drug review and approval processes, and if listing is recommended by these reviews, then we work with other provinces to reach a pricing agreement. Once these national processes are done, Alberta's Expert Committee on Drug Evaluation and Therapeutics looks at whether the drug provides better value and health outcomes than medications that are currently available, and then that provincial listing decision will be made after the other processes are completed.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for his answer. Given your efforts on several internal processes to help expedite the provincial drug listing process and given that the faster we can get these drugs and therapies approved and available to Albertans, the faster we can help those living with cystic fibrosis across Alberta, to the Minister of Health: can you commit to expediting the provincial health technology review of Trikafta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The national and provincial drug reviews are incredibly important to both government and to patients. These reviews, which are conducted by highly knowledgeable experts in their respective fields, help us to ensure that new drugs are safe, that they're effective, and that they provide value from a cost perspective. Now, Trikafta is undergoing an expedited review at the national level. It's being reviewed by Health Canada and by CADTH, the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, at the same time to speed up that process, and the provincial review will also be completed in a timely way to ensure that there is a thorough . . .

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rare diseases are underinsured in Canada and given that the cost of life-saving medicines like Trikafta, Kalydeco, and Orkambi can cost families thousands of dollars a year, a cost that saves lives but can ruin livelihoods, and given that Alberta is committed to equal access to life-saving medical care and supports for everyone, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that life-saving medicines like this are affordable and accessible for everyone?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is committed to providing Albertans with the most effective prescription drugs, based on evidence, and with better health outcomes. We recognize that there is a great deal of interest in this new drug. We know that Albertans with cystic fibrosis, like other Albertans with chronic conditions, have a keen interest in new medications that offer hope for an improved quality of life, and we share that hope, but we need to wait for the results of the expert reviews to see what the evidence shows.

COVID-19 in Child Care Centres

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, there are currently over 90 outbreaks in child care programs in Alberta, up from 19 a month ago, and this doesn't reflect the number of cases, which can be as high as 50 in one program, or cases in family members. This isn't a surprise. Medical experts warned months ago that the variants were more contagious and that children were more likely to be infected, yet no steps were taken by the UCP to prevent this spread, and shockingly they still refuse to bring in rapid testing or more funding for PPE or emergency staff. To the Minister of Children's Services: why in the world did you refuse to provide additional supports to keep children and staff in child care safe and healthy? Isn't that your job?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, first of all, I do want to thank child care operators and early childhood educators for the great work that they have done keeping kids and staff safe over the last year. I do want to point out that a lot of what the member opposite has said is just simply false. Over the past year child care operators across Alberta have received \$130 million in funding to use for their specific needs, whether that's PPE or staffing or addressing parent fees. They were able to access the SME grant for periods of closure, especially important for preschools. We created 1,500 new child care spaces. They were able to access the critical worker benefit.

2:20

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that facts are important and that that statement was false – the UCP only provided \$22.2 million in pandemic support in the last year, the lowest in the country, and it's gone – given that the School Age Care Directors Association, the YMCA, the largest nonprofit child care provider in the province, Child Care Now Alberta, and numerous child care programs have written to the minister echoing our calls for rapid testing and funding for PPE and temporary staff and given that child care programs across the province, particularly in Fort McMurray, are shutting down rooms and entire programs because they don't have adequate staff with so many educators isolating, to the minister: why have you been completely silent over the past four weeks, and why aren't you doing one single thing to address this crisis?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for the second question because I didn't get to finish my list in my first response. PPE has been requested by, I think, three or four centres across Alberta. We have made sure that centres know that they are absolutely able to access rapid testing as well. We have had very few requests, but we have worked with the chief medical officer of health to make sure that's available as well as on the guidelines to help keep kids safe. Good news: attendance is going up in child care centres right across the province. We're up to about 57 per cent from just under 50 per cent, and cases of COVID are going down.

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that the minister should read her e-mails, because I read the e-mails that she gets sent, and given that parents are understandably frustrated when they have to keep kids home to isolate and can't afford to keep paying fees for child care that they can't access and given that child care operators can't afford to refund parent fees because so many are on the brink of closure after a year of operating at half capacity with minimal support from this government and given the amount of stress and anxiety that educators, operators, and parents are experiencing as the number of infected staff and young children rises, children who don't have access to a vaccine, to the minister: what is the plan? Please spare this House the line that she will keep listening to Albertans. If she was listening, she'd be taking action.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, in addition to all of the things that I've already listed, one of the other things that we heard, especially important over the last three weeks while students transitioned to at-home learning, was making sure that out-of-school operators had the opportunity to care for children all day long. We have been flexible. We have continued to step up, listen, and adapt to the requests and the needs of child care operators across this province. We will continue to invest in child care. We know it is important for our economic recovery. Once again, I am so grateful. Last week was early childhood educator week in Alberta, and I want to say thank you for the great job they've done keeping kids and staff safe.

Ms Pancholi: They don't need thanks; they need support.

The Speaker: Order. Order. You've had your opportunity.

Public Inquiry into Anti-Alberta Energy Campaigns

Ms Ganley: Almost two years ago the Premier launched his so-called inquiry into the funding of environmental organizations. The

final report was supposed to be out last July, but it's been delayed for a fourth time. The inquiry is a million dollars over budget and has become just another embarrassment in this government's failed fight-back strategy. Can the government promise Albertans that this will be the last extension and that the inquiry will not receive another dollar of Albertans' money?

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

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the time wasted by the obstructive and frivolous lawsuit launched by Ecojustice against the commissioner, due in part to that and due in part to the complexity of ensuring administrative fairness and due process, we granted the commissioner an extra two months to complete his report. I look forward to receiving that report at the end of July.

Ms Ganley: Given that the inquiry was based off the work of Vivian Krause, which claimed that there was a deliberate and targeted campaign to put our oil and gas industry at a competitive disadvantage, and given that the Premier has repeated similar claims and given that the inquiry's website explicitly states that it's based off Krause's work, but this past week Krause backed off her initial claims, saying that there is no evidence to support the direct targeting of Alberta's industry – why is this government continuing with the inquiry if there is no evidence to support it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member across the way neglected to mention that what Vivian Krause said is that there was – she had not said that it was the oil industry in the United States targeting the oil industry in Canada. The only ones who have ever made that claim are environmental groups and the NDP. We are pulling back the curtain to look behind it to see where the funds came from, what it's been targeting, what it's been used for: who, what, where, and why.

Ms Ganley: Given that the claims are in Senate *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, and given that the inquiry will have taken two years, had four extensions, and be a million dollars over budget while peddling climate change denial known to hurt our international reputation and given that prominent conservative Donna Kennedy-Glans said in a recent podcast interview that the chair of the inquiry, Steve Allan, regrets taking on the work and said, quote, it's like no one is really clear or happy about what the outcome is supposed to be, will the Premier admit this was a waste of money?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would caution people that are speaking on panels on podcasts to throw around claims like that and to check their facts. In fact, everybody in Alberta that has been targeted, that has been hurt by this campaign, that has lost their job – we've seen revenues to the province go down. I think it's in the public interest to pull back the curtains, look behind them, and see what happened. The only ones who are afraid of that are the environmentalists and the NDP. I wonder: what are they hiding? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Coal Development Policy Consultation

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have shared their views and concerns on coal development in the eastern slopes. Our

government listened and reinstated the 1976 coal policy. Given that the government has appointed an independent Coal Policy Committee that has begun a comprehensive public engagement process to inform our long-term approach to coal development and given that that process began with a broad-reaching survey, to the Minister of Energy: what will the future stages of this process look like as we continue to listen to Albertans?

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will have various opportunities to share their thoughts with the committee. The survey was an initial step in the engagement process. The survey results are meant to help inform the committee's design of future engagement. The Coal Policy Committee is reviewing the results of those surveys. It has gained insights through the various responses and will be designing the next steps and what consultation will look like moving forward. There'll be lots of opportunities for Albertans to share their views.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the survey that ran from March 29 to April 19 solicited 25,000 responses from Albertans and given that concerns were raised with respect to coal exploration and given that there were six exploration projects under way, four of which had been permitted during the tenure of the previous government, can the minister please explain the actions she undertook to ease the concerns of Albertans as the Coal Policy Committee continues their review?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're taking further steps to demonstrate that we are having an open and honest conversation with Albertans. That's why we not only paused all future exploration in category 2 lands, but we halted and we stopped current ongoing exploration. Unlike the previous government, who encouraged exploration in the sensitive areas, as shown by their letter by the previous NDP minister in May of 2016, we're going to deliver on our promise to Albertans for a comprehensive coal policy that responds . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of the survey responses shared touched on the need to protect the environment and given that economic development and growth are also important to Albertans and given that consultations will be focused on the development of a modern coal policy, again to the minister: can the minister please speak to how the committee will balance these interests that Albertans are expressing?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are encouraged to share all of their thoughts related to coal. To be absolutely clear, that includes that no one will be restricted from sharing their concerns about environmental issues related to coal development or any topics relating to coal. A large focus of the engagement will be on the aspects of coal development that sparked public concern when we rescinded the policy, and that's largely on the coal categories that set out various restrictions. To be clear, engagement will also cover areas such as coal tenure and royalty, resource management and conservation, and regulatory oversight.

2:30

Mr. Schmidt: Well, last weekend was the one-year anniversary of the UCP quietly removing the 1976 Lougheed coal policy. Luckily, they got caught, and Albertans made it clear that they don't support such a move. The government was forced to temporarily halt its plans and finally consult with Albertans, and over 25,000 Albertans participated in the survey, more than 90 per cent of whom flat out rejected mining in the Rockies and the foothills. There is a bill before this House that would implement strong legal protections for these lands. Will the government finally reconsider its position and debate the Eastern Slopes Protection Act in this House?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, we have a Coal Policy Committee out for consultation right now. We have halted all exploration – all exploration – in category 2 lands, unlike the previous government, who actually opened the door. We're here with all of the coal exploration because of their letter in May 2016 that opened the door. It was a bypass, it was a workaround the coal policy, inviting companies to come in and do exploration and development in sensitive category 2 lands. That's what we're fixing, that's what we've shut down, and that's what we're listening to Albertans . . .

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

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that I had no idea that our letter repealed the 1976 Lougheed coal policy and given that of the 25,000 Albertans who took the survey, 70 per cent expressed that they feel that coal development has a major effect on them and given that Albertans expressed that they were particularly concerned with the impacts that coal development would have on water, air, health, wildlife, and their ability to enjoy activities and given that the government has so far refused to consult on any of these issues, will the government change its mind now and properly consult on issues of water quality, air quality, health, protecting wildlife in its consultations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what the Coal Policy Committee is consulting on, all aspects related to coal as long as it's related to coal and is not broader land-use policy and broader management. If it's related to coal, that's exactly what the coal committee is consulting on. Unlike the previous government, unlike the NDP government, who bypassed the 1976 coal policy in one letter in May 2016, opening the doors to a vast array of exploration in the area, we're listening to Albertans, and we're going to protect the cherished lands. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is the only one with the call.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister just said that the Coal Policy Committee can consult on the very things that she has forbidden them to consult on in writing and given that the government provided promises to coal companies prior to rescinding the '76 coal policy and given that the Official Opposition has asked the Auditor General to investigate this boondoggle and the government's rescission of the policy, will the government commit to supporting a full investigation into this matter by the Auditor General? Yes or no?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, I would assume that the NDP request to the Auditor General to examine the coal policy rescission would be broader than that and that it would look at the May 2016 letter that the NDP sent to a coal company saying: come to Alberta and

explore and set up development on the eastern slopes. I hope it would take a look at that. We're here today talking about coal because they opened the door to foreign companies to come to Alberta and explore in the sensitive areas.

Support for Women-owned Businesses

Member Irwin: Entrepreneurs and business owners across the province are barely making ends meet during the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women in particular have faced additional barriers as they balance their businesses and their family responsibilities. Even before the pandemic Alberta women business owners were almost twice as likely as women in other parts of the country and 30 per cent more likely than Alberta men to have to close their businesses. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: how are you addressing the unique needs of women who own businesses? Please be specific as we can't find a thing on your website.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of the status of women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation for the great work that he's done. He was actually meeting across the province with various chambers to talk about exactly the issues that you bring up, specifically around the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant, specifically around women. Women are 51 per cent of our population. We also have the highest percentage of entrepreneurs in Canada. For every 100 entrepreneur men in Canada, there are 67. In Alberta it's 81. Women in Alberta are entrepreneurs. They know what they are doing. They know how to ask for help, and they know which government to ask to help them.

Member Irwin: Given that Alberta women entrepreneurs in the start-up stages of businesses outpace men as well as women in other regions in Canada and that these start-ups are vital to Alberta's economy today and in the future – in Alberta's NDP we've proposed a specific grant to help women-run businesses and start-ups – yet the Premier failed to manage the third wave of COVID, meaning that it's going to last longer and will cause more harm to those very start-ups and businesses, to the minister: will you adopt our idea? You've said that you're listening. Will you provide specific funding support to women so they can get through this COVID-19 pandemic?

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The small and medium enterprise relaunch grants are directed specifically at entrepreneurs and specifically at women. In this province we have more entrepreneurial women per capita. In fact, if you look at the tech companies that are opening up here right now – we have 3,000 new tech companies – 50 per cent of those are owned by women, which is 50 per cent higher than the global average. That is because women come to this province knowing that they have the opportunities afforded to them here that they may not have across Canada. Alberta is ahead in this. Alberta will continue. Alberta supports women entrepreneurs.

Member Irwin: We're hearing from women business owners that the communication from this government is confusing, frustrating, and infuriating, and women, we know, are more likely to shutter their doors rather than sell their businesses, unlike men. We need this government to actually do something specific, to help these

businesses make it through the pandemic and cut down on the crippling debt that so many of them are facing. To the minister. Many other jurisdictions have specific streams of funding for women entrepreneurs. Should Alberta really be an outlier? How does that set us up for our economic future?

Mrs. Aheer: What is frustrating is when the NDP uses women as victims versus the strong, competent, amazing human beings that are in this province, that have built this province from the ground up. They need the same and exact amount of money as any men, including making sure banks and other organizations are investing in women. Every time we invest in women in this province, we invest in Alberta. When women thrive, Alberta thrives. This is the mandate of this government. We stand behind that. We will make sure that we fund women entrepreneurs. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Financial Literacy Curriculum and Programming

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring all students have the essential knowledge and practical skills they will need to navigate financial decisions. That's why the Minister of Education announced a grant totalling \$1 million for organizations who can help students deliver financial literacy training to older age Alberta students beginning in the fall of 2021. Can the minister share with this House exactly how more financial literacy training will benefit Alberta students?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that important question. As a parent I understand how important it is for our children to have the knowledge and skills they need for the real world. From a young age children having even a basic understanding of what money is and how it works will help better serve them for the future, both in and outside the classroom. These are important lessons that can be taught and learned from a young age, and this will help to both develop their skills and understandings of real-world problems but also provide them with the tools to face them.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta government will help Alberta students learn financial literacy skills with this program, including the study of important financial concepts such as costs, interest, debt, investing, insurance, and how the economy affects their lives, can the minister inform the House if the government has been successful in funding other such education programs in the past?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This call for grant proposals builds on successful programs that we funded this year. The programs worked with 39,000 students in grades 4 to 12 in urban, rural, and indigenous communities across the province. Students were taught about managing finances, work readiness, and entrepreneurship. We heard feedback from those who participated in the programs, and students said two things. First, after taking the program, they felt more comfortable with money, and, second, they feel better prepared for their future. We want to build on these programs.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring all students have the essential knowledge and practical skills they will need to navigate financial decisions. That's why the Minister of Education announced a grant totalling \$1 million for organizations who can help schools deliver financial literacy training to older age Albertans beginning in the fall of 2021. Oh, I think I read the wrong one. Sorry. Can the minister share with the House exactly how more financial literacy training will benefit Alberta students?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, as I said, not only do we want students to be introduced to this information at a young age to understand real-world problems but also to have the tools to face them. The new draft curriculum is also introducing children to this concept of financial literacy early on. For the first time students in kindergarten to grade 6 will learn about financial literacy in every grade, from a basic understanding of a dollar to creating a budget. Students will be learning skills that will help them beyond the classroom. These are important lessons that will serve students in their future and can be applied to real-world problems that people face every day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will proceed to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Camrose. This bill was referred to the committee on April 15, 2021. The report recommends that Bill 216 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 216.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act, is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members who wish to speak to concurrence?

Seeing none, the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has requested concurrence in the report on Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the deputy chair of the standing committee on private bills.

Mr. Schow: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. This bill was referred to the committee on April 12, 2021. The report recommends that Bill Pr. 2 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill Pr. 2.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021, is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has requested concurrence in the report on Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of two motions. First, I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 81, to be put on the Order Paper in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, is resumed, not more than one hour should be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

I also give oral notice, Mr. Speaker, of Government Motion 82, also in my name.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly agrees that

- (a) the spread of the COVID-19 virus negatively impacts the health of Albertans, the economy, and businesses;
- (b) Albertans have made important efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19, but experience and evidence have shown that Albertans must remain vigilant against transmission;
- (c) the spread of COVID-19 virus is slowed when individuals who are sick stay home;
- (d) paid sick days are the best measure to ensure workers do not have to choose between staying home when sick and providing for their families; and
- (e) legislated paid sick days are one of the best tools the provincial government has to keep Albertans healthy, keep people working, and help our economy recover as this pandemic continues.

Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to follow the lead of British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon and immediately introduce a bill to provide for legislated paid sick leave for all Alberta workers.

The Speaker: Just confirming, hon. member, that you have the appropriate copies for the page.

Ms Gray: I do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 72

Preserving Canada's Economic Prosperity Act

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 72, Preserving Canada's Economic Prosperity Act.

Mr. Speaker, our government time and time again has demonstrated our unwavering commitment to protecting the value of our resources and ensuring that we have every option available to us to defend Alberta, our economy, our resources, and our people. This legislation clearly shows just how serious we are about defending the constitutionally protected right we have to manage our own natural resources. Should any other jurisdiction attempt to unconstitutionally block Alberta's energy resources, it will give Alberta's democratically elected government the ability to fight back by restricting the oil and gas shipments.

It had previously been said and remains true that for Confederation to benefit all Canadians, it has to be an economic union that allows exports to happen without obstruction. Compared to the previous legislation, Mr. Speaker, this bill will strengthen our defence against legal challenges by removing the reference to refined fuels. While we continue to seek the path of diplomacy wherever possible, we will continue to assertively protect Alberta's vital economic interests, and I firmly believe that this legislation represents a necessary step to ensure that we have every option available to us to defend our province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 72.

[Motion carried; Bill 72 read a first time]

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, a response to Written Question 3, asked for by Ms Phillips on November 30, 2020, how many applications for public agency board positions were received by the Public Agency Secretariat between April 20, 2019, and October 19, 2020; a response to Motion for a Return 12, asked for by Ms Phillips on November 30, 2020, copies of the competition matrix for each position posted between April 20, 2019, and October 19, 2020, on the Public Agency Secretariat public agency board opportunities website; a response to Motion for a Return 13, asked for by Ms Phillips on November 30, 2020, a list of public agency board opportunities posted, including competition number, opening date, closing date, job description, and the ministry, agency, board, or commission seeking applicants between April 20, 2019, and October 19, 2020, for which an executive or professional search firm was contracted.

On behalf of hon. Mrs. Savage, Minister of Energy, a response to Motion for a Return 6, asked for by Ms Ganley, on November 30, 2020, copies of all documents, including but not limited to business plans, agendas, minutes, ministerial orders, and directives prepared by the government between April 16, 2019, and October 16, 2019, relating to the incorporation of the Canadian Energy Centre as a provincial corporation under the Financial Administration Act.

Responses to questions raised by Mr. Schmidt, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on March 16, 2021, Ministry of Energy 2021-22 main estimates debate.

2:50

On behalf of hon. Mrs. Aheer, Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, a response to Written Question 2, asked for by Mr. Deol on November 30, 2020, how many agencies, minutes, and reports on key measurement targets

have been produced by Alberta's Anti-Racism Advisory Council from May 1, 2019, to October 19, 2020.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the appropriate time the Official Opposition House Leader provided oral notice of an SO 42. I would now invite her to provide brief remarks on why this is of urgent nature and not debate the content of a motion.

Paid Sick Leave during COVID-19 Pandemic

Ms Gray:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly agrees that:

- (a) the spread of the COVID-19 virus negatively impacts the health of Albertans, the economy, and businesses;
- (b) Albertans have made important efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19, but experience and evidence have shown that Albertans must remain vigilant against transmission;
- (c) the spread of COVID-19 virus is slowed when individuals who are sick stay home;
- (d) paid sick days are the best measure to ensure workers do not have to choose between staying home when sick and providing for their families; and
- (e) legislated paid sick days are one of the best tools the provincial government has to keep Albertans healthy, keep people working, and help our economy recover as this pandemic continues.

Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to follow the lead of British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon and immediately introduce a bill to provide for legislated paid sick leave for all Alberta workers.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members for their consideration. I certainly will speak to the urgency of this. Now, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 42, and I am requesting that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate specifically this motion. I believe it is urgent for all members to have an opportunity to talk about the facts and the importance of this very pressing solution to a lot of the challenges we're having with the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, the motion which I read under Notices of Motions has been distributed to members of the Assembly, and I've provided an adequate number of copies as well as an electronic copy to the table. Although it requires no notice, I did send a notice to your office, Mr. Speaker, of my intention to introduce this motion under the appropriate standing orders. I appreciate the opportunity under Standing Order 42, where all members can ensure that matters important to their constituents are debated and addressed in this House.

To briefly outline why it's urgent and pressing today, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that just as they did over Christmas, Albertans again have made sacrifices and worked very hard to juggle work, parenting, schooling, our own well-being and mental health to lower the case counts of COVID-19. We are just now seeing the fruits of the efforts meant to bring down the cases in this third wave. So we're making progress, but we know that we are not out of the woods. Cases remain high in hospitals and ICUs. Children are returning to schools this week. This speaks to the urgency of the need for this debate. The government is also talking about moving to a next stage of reopening, and I think that presses urgency onto us, having this debate prior to that larger policy choice being made by the government.

Nothing could be more urgent, Mr. Speaker, than continuing to lower the rates of COVID-19 infections. We know that COVID-19 can be spread in workplaces like meat-packing plants, work camps, long-term care but also retail stores, also buses, also so many other environments, office spaces. We know that the spread of the COVID-19 virus is slowed when individuals who are sick stay home, and we know that paid sick days are one of the best methods to ensure that workers do not come to work. As we look at reopening, that is where the urgency comes in because more and more workers may be returning to offices or other work environments. Legislated paid sick days are an important tool that the provincial government has to keep Albertans working.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has said that room and board for isolating workers is sufficient, and I think that that is another reason why this debate is urgent. I think right now that there is a conversation happening between the government and the Official Opposition where we're not quite hearing each other. We're not hearing what's happening because the solutions that the Premier is talking about are good, but they don't address the problem that paid sick days do. I think that this debate could allow us to clear the air, to make sure that we're talking about the same things and doing everything we can to support Albertans on the eve of reopening. I won't go into the debate of that, but I think it's really important that we be able to flesh out why the Premier's stated solution is not the correct fit that paid sick days are. Certainly, we saw a lot of workplace infections driving part of the third wave, reflecting what was going on with community spread.

Secondly, again, with the reopening happening, with businesses having been put under so much pressure, there's been confusion around who might pay for a solution like this. I think it's urgent that we have the debate so we can make very clear what our policy options are to be able to support Albertans. Certainly, I believe it's also urgent because Alberta is behind the eight ball, with four, five other provinces having already taken these life-saving steps to keep people safe, and they did this because of the urgency, because it was important during that third wave.

That's why I believe that the debate needs to be brought here to the Alberta Chamber, and right now that debate doesn't seem to be happening. I realize it was raised in question period today, but even there, Mr. Speaker, we had the Official Opposition talking about paid sick days and the Premier talking about other supports that don't match that same need. That's why I think we need the urgent debate. Question period in 30-second chunks isn't letting that case be made for what paid sick days are.

Certainly, there's lots of support for this across the spectrum, but I won't get into that debate. Instead, I will simply say that taking care of our loved ones and making sure workers are able to follow public health guidelines are critical. That's why we're asking the Assembly to recognize this, grant the unanimous consent necessary for us to have a real discussion and debate, something compelling and of interest to all members of this Assembly, because it is a measure that would genuinely support workers and support our COVID-19 response. Other provinces have taken that step.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 is a request for unanimous consent to dispose of the other business before the Assembly and move immediately to the motion as proposed by the Official Opposition House Leader. I will ask only one question. Is there anyone opposed to granting unanimous consent? If so, indicate now.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 52
Recall Act

[Adjourned debate April 19: Ms Goehring]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs adjourned debate. She has six minutes remaining.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have to say how disappointed I am that we're here talking about this piece of legislation, Bill 52, the Recall Act, when . . . [A timer sounded]

The Speaker: Apologies for the interruption. We'll just have the clock set correctly, and then you will have approximately six minutes remaining. Feel free to proceed. Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [A timer sounded] Just kidding.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. As I was saying, I'm disappointed that we're talking about Bill 52 when our House leader was asking this Assembly to talk about something that all Albertans are talking about, an emergency debate to discuss what we're going to do to help our workers with paid sick leave. While she couldn't get into the arguments of the debate for having the emergency hearing, I think that every Albertan wants to know what this government is doing to support them. When they talk about what this government could do to support, they want to hear us talking about things like legislated paid sick days and not Bill 52, a Recall Act. I'm disappointed that there wasn't unanimous consent to talk about something that every Albertan is talking about, which is this pandemic that is impacting so many.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We have an ability in this building to make decisions that can positively impact Albertans, our workers in this province. We've seen other provinces take the lead. They're providing legislated paid sick days, yet this government doesn't want to talk about it. All we were asking today was to debate this, and unfortunately, members of government decided that it wasn't important. I think that that gives a huge message to Albertans, that their livelihoods aren't important to this government. They would rather talk about Bill 52, a Recall Act, that unfortunately wouldn't even come into effect to enable Albertans to recall any of the members sitting in this Chamber. Because of the timelines that they've introduced, anyone that's currently sitting as an MLA in this building today would not be part of this legislation.

3:00

We've seen the government act on decisions based on community outcry, based on behaviours of their caucus, and they've been removed from government caucus. Now, what if the ability had been there, with this piece of legislation that they're proposing, to actually give the people of those communities the opportunity to recall their Member of the Legislative Assembly? If the Premier and this government truly wanted to have an impact, to give voice to Albertans, to give them the ability to recall their elected official – I think we've seen some pretty clear examples of

Albertans wanting to get their member replaced. Unfortunately, this legislation doesn't allow for that to happen in this session.

Instead of talking about what Albertans are talking about, which is the pandemic, paid sick leave, livelihoods, this government wants to put in a piece of legislation – and I've heard the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction say: promise made, promise kept. Well, Albertans aren't looking for a promise made, promise kept in terms of recall. They're looking for jobs. They're looking for safety and security in their jobs. This government ran on a platform saying that they were going to bring jobs to the province. We were offering an opportunity to help Albertans maintain their jobs, maintain their livelihoods in a pandemic when people have to go off on sick leave. That's what Albertans are talking about: are they going to have paid sick leave with their employer if they're following the guidelines that are set out to keep people safe? That's what people are talking about, not this piece of legislation that allows the individuals in Alberta to come up with an opportunity to recall their elected official.

When we look at this piece of legislation, there are two different standards. There's a three-step process for MLAs, and there's a two-step process for municipal electeds and school trustees. No explanation about why that decision was made. We know that there was a committee that was put forward to discuss the ins and outs of this piece of legislation, yet my understanding is that those experts that were consulted with from that panel: their feedback isn't incorporated into this piece of legislation. They said that the threshold is too high, and it makes it nearly impossible to actually have the ability to recall an elected official.

This government created this illusion of consultation and listening to the experts, and then they take what the experts say, and they do what they want, which is not something new. This is something that we've continued to see from this government when there is a consultation. I know I hear often that the people that should be at the table aren't at the table, but here we have an example of experts that provided their insight, said that the threshold that is currently being proposed is way too high, that 40 per cent – it's not actually usable legislation. What does that say to the experts that they're consulting with? "We want your opinion. We want to be able to hear what you say. You guys are the experts in this, in recall legislation, but we're not going to take what you have to say. We're just going to do what we want."

That's definitely a theme that this government has, "We're going to do what we want despite what is happening out there in the province," which is really unfortunate because I know that the people of Edmonton-Castle Downs are worried. They're worried about jobs, they're worried about sick leave, they're worried about COVID, and they're not seeing the leadership that is required from this government to actually put their stresses at ease. I don't know how many times I've heard: "Is that recall legislation in effect yet? There are sure some members that I would like to have recalled." And I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that those are representatives of government.

But I have to tell them that this isn't something that's actually doable. The government is putting forward this piece of legislation, and there is so much red tape that it makes it nearly impossible to actually be able to recall your Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's with great excitement that I rise today to speak on the issue of recall. One of the things

that I want to start off by saying is that you're right; this was an election platform that we ran on. It was a key component of our election platform, and like so many of the other pieces of our election platform – and I believe it ran into the hundreds; I think it was over 200. We have kept and passed through this House to this point almost 90 per cent of all of the election platforms that we ran on in the last election. If you're going to judge a government, there are many ways that you can do that, but one of the ways that you should judge a government is based on whether or not they keep the promises that they make during an election. This is one of those promises that we made and that we're going to be keeping, assuming that the Legislature passes this piece of legislation.

I believe that citizens deserve accountability from their elected officials and that that goes beyond just on the night that they get elected, but it continues all the way through until the election cycle is finished. I do believe that the majority of our public officials, the vast majority of them, the people that place their names before the people of Alberta to see if they can become an MLA and become a representative of the people, go in with good motives. They go in to serve the people of this province. But there are times when recall might be an appropriate thing to look at in this province.

I first heard of the concept of recall when I was a member and a volunteer of the Reform Party of Canada in the 1980s and the 1990s. Recall was a part of the slate of grassroots initiatives that this federal political party was pushing forward to address some of the needs and some of the issues that were obvious at that point in time in the history of Canada. I came to believe that recall would strengthen our system of democracy in Canada, and I believe it'll do the same in Alberta. Over the course of my two terms as an MLA in the Alberta Legislature I've had the privilege of trying to move recall legislation forward through two private member's bills, and I had the privilege of being able to serve on the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee. It's through that process that I come to this Legislature today still believing that this legislation is good for the people of Alberta.

Legislation is always about developing a consensus. It starts with an idea, and that idea takes hold in the minds of the citizens and then through their representatives. If the idea has merit, it will gather enough momentum that it is brought before the people's House for their consideration. It's been a rare privilege to serve the people of Alberta, and it's been a rare privilege to have the opportunity to bring forward another layer of people power that will enhance the grassroots nature of our provincial democracy. Democracy moves at the pace of the people, and in this case I believe that the people are going to be well served should this bill become legislation.

I want to take a second today to recognize those who have had a hand historically in bringing forward the idea of recall. I want to start with an individual that was a political mentor of mine, Mr. Preston Manning, an individual, I believe, that was able to articulate not only a vision for the west in moving forward within this Confederation but a man of great insight and thoughtfulness, who absolutely supports and supported the idea of recall. I want to recognize that there has been a host of people, from Bert Brown to everyday Albertans, that have supported this concept of recall. I worked with many of them through the 1980s and the 1990s, and for many of them they're looking at this piece of legislation and saying: yes; finally, it's here.

I want to recognize all of the previous MLAs – and there are some in this Legislature – that have also brought forward legislation on recall for they've had a piece of this momentum as we've moved forward. They've spoken in favour of it in the Legislature, and they've kept the idea alive to the point where we can now debate this fully as a government bill. I want to thank the committee

members, my colleagues that sat on the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee, for their vision and for their hard work in the creation of this bill.

3:10

Now, this bill introduces an opportunity for Albertans at every level of government to exercise more control. Sadly, we don't have any capacity to influence federal politics, so we're not introducing recall at the federal level. But with this bill, should it pass, we will have the capacity not only to recall an MLA that maybe is truly not doing the job but also municipal councillors and even school board trustees.

All here – well, maybe not everyone here, but some of you here in this Legislature may remember that I first introduced this as a part of a private member's bill in 2015 and then again in 2019. I think you can see that it's an important topic for me and one that I'm personally committed to. I believe that it has the opportunity, when used properly, to really, actually strengthen our system of democracy, so I'm pleased to see that the key points that we set forward out of the committee are within this legislation that has been tabled here in this House.

Recall petitions will need to be signed for all three groups, whether we're talking about MLAs or councillors or trustees. The recall of an MLA will also go through a recall vote by the local constituency. Recall shouldn't be easy. Recall shouldn't be able to occur simply because somebody on the other side of an election didn't like the results of that election, but it should be possible. So we ride that balance between trying to find a system that moves forward, that will allow for the recall of an MLA or a school board trustee or a municipal councillor that has sorely abused their capacity and their responsibility as an elected official while at the same time trying to keep it above political manoeuvrings. Maybe we can put it that way.

We are going to see this brought down to the local level, to the level of the constituents that chose that MLA or chose that representative. They will have to go through a recall vote by the local constituency. This vote is not extended to the municipalities nor to the school trustees, to remove an undue financial burden. We recognize that there is a difference between provincial MLAs and municipal councillors and school board trustees. To answer one of my colleagues across the way here, one of the reasons that we've not extended that vote to the municipalities and to the school boards is simply one of financial reasons. They've got completely different financial capacities, depending on the levels of government that we're talking about, so we felt that it was in the best interests to not place that burden of finances on the lower levels.

A recall petition cannot be started less than 18 months after an election. This prevents those that are opposed to the elected candidate from immediately trying to overturn a result from a general election. It's providing stability to the election system. It also provides the elected candidate the time to acclimate to their position and to begin working to gain the trust of their electorate now that they've been chosen by that electorate.

A recall petition cannot be started within six months or less before the next election is set to begin. That would be simply a waste of time and resources, to allow for such a petition when the electorate are in a very short period of time going to get an opportunity to see if they want to maintain and to keep that relationship with their elected representative.

Petitions will require 40 per cent of the number of electors that are on the post polling-day list of electors, and this gives an unambiguous number that can be set in stone and considers those that needed to register on the polling day. You'll have 60 days to gather those signatures for your petition. Difficult? Yes, but this is

a very serious thing we're going through, and it should be difficult. People must live in the constituency for at least three months before they can sign the petition.

So we see that there are a series of steps, of benchmarks that we have to achieve. For elected municipal officials they have to get 40 per cent of the eligible voters in the municipality or ward, and for school trustees the Albertans have 120 days to gather signatures from 40 per cent of the eligible voters in that school district. If the petition is successful, the voters, in the case of an MLA, would then vote to determine if they indeed wanted, as a constituency, to recall that MLA, and if the vote is successful, then the MLA would be removed and a by-election would be held to choose a new representative. If the recall petition for the elected municipal level of government is successful, the elected official is removed once the petition is presented at the next council meeting.

We can see that recall legislation, I believe, is long overdue. It will mean the same thing to every party and to every individual that is elected by the people of Alberta, and it's time to be more focused on representing your constituency and the people that are in it. This legislation empowers voters to hold elected officials accountable not just during the election but in the middle of the term as well, and it recognizes that the will of the people is sometimes influenced by parties and the government's actions on the provincial level. This will encourage, I believe, within our system of democracy, within the MLAs of the government, more consultation and more thought about the effects that those decisions and those bills and those regulations and those policies that they are bringing forward are going to have on the people that they serve.

I want to thank the government for bringing this forward, and I look forward to continuing to watch this legislation move through the House and become a reality and a tool for the people of Alberta. I want to thank the Premier and my caucus colleagues for their vision in realizing that, at its heart, democracy is about empowering the people to act.

Finally, to the people of Alberta, it's my pleasure to announce that, should the recall bill pass through this Legislature, you will have an additional tool of democracy for your consideration. Use it wisely. Use it wisely to strengthen our democracy, use it to develop a consensus, use it to articulate a vision for the future, and use it to increase accountability, but, most importantly, use it for the benefit of all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 52, the Recall Act. Just quickly, I would also like to echo the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs in my profound disappointment in the fact that this government chose this afternoon to decline the opportunity to support SO 42, paid sick leave for workers in our economy who find themselves sick with COVID-19. I think it's absolutely frustrating that not only has the Legislature been pushed back for the last three weeks, but now that we are back here we are, before us, discussing Bill 52 instead of important opportunities to support the economy. I imagine that you can appreciate that this government was elected on priorities like jobs, pipelines, and the economy. Unfortunately, we have seen very little, if any, on any of those issues. Here we have an opportunity to support the economy and, in turn, workers who find themselves sick that are trying to support their families, yet this government says no to supporting them.

3:20

It takes me back, Madam Speaker, to just recently, actually. A class of grade 6s asked: if an opportunity arose, would we work together with this government or would the government work together with us to move forward on important pieces of legislation? I look at that SO 42, paid sick days . . .

Speaker's Ruling Items Previously Decided

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just to draw your attention to Standing Order 23(c), "persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session." We will ask that you move past the SO 42 and the decision that was made in this Assembly. You can continue with the debate on Bill 52.

Debate Continued

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. This will circle back to the fact that consultation needs to be done no matter what piece of legislation we are discussing. So while we had consulted on that bill, I'm sure that the UCP had many opportunities to hear of Alberta workers who would have appreciated seeing that move forward, yet we see that denial of the opportunity here this afternoon. Looking at Bill 52, the Recall Act, similarly, when we consider the lack of consultation, once again, I can appreciate that there were opportunities within this session or previous sessions to discuss Bill 52 and the regulations and opportunities that are found within it.

In principle I can see myself potentially supporting something like recall legislation, but the problem is that what we have before us in Bill 52 leaves many more questions than there are answers, Madam Speaker. We see that clearly through some of the comments from other organizations across the province. I will get to those shortly, I'm sure. But when we look at what is in this bill – and it's been spoken about several times this afternoon and in previous discussions – the fact is that there are two separate sets of rules for provincial MLAs or for provincial bodies, and the rules are much different for boards and municipal councillors in our province. It's frustrating for me because I want to come to this House and be able to support legislation being put forward by this government if it is done properly with proper consultation, with transparency at the heart of it, and the opportunity, as the previous member just stated, to build consensus. But we've seen quite the opposite of this.

I thought it was quite interesting to hear the previous member speak about the financial hardships being put on, potentially, municipalities or school boards in this instance, when it comes to Bill 52, the Recall Act. The member stated that we have one set of rules provincially for MLAs and another set for school boards and municipalities because of financial implications. So we've already come to a place where we can't level the playing field because this government is not willing to support their own legislation with the funds that need to be put in place.

Any time we are talking about changing legislation, whether it's Bill 52, the Recall Act, whether it's changes to MSI or any funding agreements that are happening between the provincial government and other bodies in the province, we need to ensure that we are putting funding in place to make sure that those processes can move forward. It takes me back to the idea that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has come up with, that municipalities need to have report cards, and, you know, I haven't heard it more recently, but at one point I was very concerned about the idea of performance-based funding for municipalities, as we've seen this government talk about so much for our postsecondary institutions.

Once again, when we make these decisions to change accountability for different bodies, to change how they track their funds or how they track other things, we need to make sure that there is proper funding available for those changes. It goes for Bill 52, it goes for the changes to referenda across the province, it goes for changes around, potentially, Senate elections. We've seen many pieces of legislation, Madam Speaker, from this government that are going to completely change the playing field for all levels of government.

I consider the situation that this government has found itself in just over the last weekend. We saw 99 per cent of ATA members, those teachers and administrators who are working so hard across the province to support the students in our classrooms, to support the families in our communities – they overwhelmingly voted, 99 per cent, Madam Speaker, in the nonconfidence of this current Education minister. We can look back further to the discussions of physicians across this province. I believe that number was around 97 per cent disapproval or nonconfidence in the Health minister.

You quickly start to see, in my opinion, why it might be valuable for this government not only to be putting this legislation forward with no timelines for implementation but also to have two separate playing fields between MLAs and school boards and municipal councillors. I can only imagine that when school boards make the decision, as the overwhelming majority have, again, to not support the draft curriculum that we've seen put forward by this Education minister – and in previous instances we've seen the Minister of Education actually threaten school boards across our province; for instance, the Calgary board of education, when they weren't willing to do certain things that the minister was asking for, which I can appreciate – it leaves an opportunity for this minister or this government to make decisions like the one we see before us, where there is a separate playing field for boards. So if they speak out of turn, potentially, we might see campaigns going against them from one side or the other to attack their credibility, attack their integrity, attack their decisions that they've made while they are, just as we are, elected officials in the province of Alberta.

We've heard to some extent the differences between this three-step process for MLAs and this two-step process for municipal councillors and for school boards, and it is very concerning for me, Madam Speaker.

We, as I mentioned earlier, have had the opportunity to discuss this at Alberta's Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee. Unfortunately, many of the good recommendations that our caucus had put forward have not been followed through in what we see in Bill 52, and I could say the same for organizations outside of this building who have also put forward their own recommendations or potentially, at first, had shown soft support for this legislation, or maybe they didn't support it at all in the first place, but they have put forward recommendations that have also not been followed through in Bill 52, have not been clarified through the discussions that we've had inside or outside of this House since this bill came before us.

When we look at some of those recommendations, we saw this government partially accept the recommendations that we put forward on having a reference to a limit on financial expenses and contributions, but unfortunately there's no effective limit in the legislation that we see before us. We are once again told that we have to wait for the regulations to be developed to see that, and it's extremely unfortunate that we continue time and time again to find ourselves in this position, where we are expected to vote on a piece of unfinished legislation and are told by this government: don't worry; we are going to do the right thing after it leaves the Legislature.

But, Madam Speaker, I've had countless conversations, whether it's with constituents of mine or people from organizations that have been affected by legislation put forward by this government, where time and time again they are, quote, unquote, consulted on a piece of legislation. Potentially, they even stand up with this UCP government to support it, but then when the legislation comes forward, it's completely different than what they were promised in those consultation processes. We have seen that so many times. It's hard to even count how many times that's happened, and at the end of the day it's frustrating for myself trying to represent my constituents, you know, who are hearing one thing and then seeing another.

The same goes for the stakeholders potentially in Service Alberta, potentially in any other critic portfolio that we have those conversations with on this side of the House, that we really have come to a point where we just can't trust what this government is saying, what this government is putting forward, and it makes it really hard to even want to continue those consultations when you know that the outcome is going to be much different than the original conversation that took place, Madam Speaker.

3:30

We see from crossjurisdictional analysis and the conversations the accountability committee had the opportunity to bring forward and hear from stakeholders that, whether it be the conversation around the thresholds specific, likely, to the MLA piece within the legislation, the opportunities for recall of our MLAs, whether we talk about the lack of transparency around funding and how these projects, well, these recall opportunities, will be funded, depending on if it's trying to recall an MLA, trying to recall a school board representative, a complete lack of transparency around that fact and lack of rules around that fact – it is, Madam Speaker, just very hard for me to take it at face value, to support this piece of legislation that's before us. I honestly, in principle, would want to support this legislation, but the fact is that it comes so short on so many levels.

I have to reflect once again, Madam Speaker, on the fact that we should have been sitting three weeks ago. We should have been talking about how we're going to get people back to work, how we are going to support people who find themselves with COVID, how we are going to ensure that this province is putting its best foot forward for all Albertans, yet here we are discussing a bill that is going to do none of those things to support Albertans.

Unfortunately, once again, Bill 52, the Recall Act, is being proposed as kind of a "Do as I say, not as I do" government bill from the UCP because they have no intent, as far as I can tell, to ensure that this is in place to hold any of the current government MLAs accountable. It will more than likely be used against whoever is in this Legislature in the next election, and that's fair in principle, Madam Speaker, but if the government want to stand behind their piece of legislation, if they want to say, "It's good enough for us, and it should be good enough for you," then it's hard to understand why we aren't seeing this move forward in terms of timelines for implementation after it leaves this Legislature, why we don't see it being put in place even faster.

But I have an inkling that it's based on some of the things that we've seen happen within this Legislature primarily over the last three weeks, when we weren't sitting in here. Of course, Madam Speaker, we saw the government caucus chair step down and actually call for this current Premier to resign. Unfortunately, Albertans won't have that opportunity to recall this Premier or that member who has actually stepped out of the caucus or the other member who has made that decision either.

There are a lot of moving parts here, the least of which is that we have a municipal election on the horizon, and we've seen this

government changing rules around municipal elections, changing rules around opportunities for a referendum, changing rules about financial accountability. At that time when those discussions were happening, once again we had municipal councillors and stakeholders for that legislation come forward and raise their concerns and, once that bill came forward, were incredibly disappointed to see one of the most important pieces around financial transparency and ensuring that donations that come in to candidates specifically on a municipal level will be counted before the election takes place, a commitment that I believe in early days this government was willing to at least consider – but sadly, as far as I know, Madam Speaker, that didn't come through.

Now, I just want to take a moment to once again reflect on the conversations that happened at the Alberta Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee that this government . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks very much for the very astute analysis by my colleague in regard to this Bill 52, Recall Act. It just took me back to many prospective pieces of legislation that have come through this House for me to witness where there's an underlying concept that might be quite promising and intriguing. Indeed, considering all of the abhorrent and ridiculous things that have been happening with this UCP government over the last number of weeks, with the Minister of Education, for example, having a 99 per cent rejection from the teachers of this province, probably a good 90 per cent – I didn't do the percentage – of the school boards of the province rejecting this prospective curriculum, 96 per cent of the doctors voting to reject not just the concept that the Health minister was bringing forward but the actual leadership of the Health minister himself, you know, this all just kind of helped to sharpen in my mind how there is a place and a time for something like recall legislation in a democratic environment, specifically here in the province of Alberta. And then sort of to top it off, again, a rejection of the Premier by caucus members, reflecting, of course, probably widespread sentiments that these MLAs were hearing from their constituents across the province, as we have been, of course, as well.

You know, the concept – it's almost like the time is ripe for it in a way, but then you have the same government who is being rejected by these things happening to the Health minister, to the Premier, to the Education minister coming up with recall legislation that, quite frankly, is clunky and is not dysfunctional and doesn't have the power to actually act on a pressing issue like we might see here today in the province of Alberta. I think that you're heading down the right path there in regard to how this legislation leaves us wanting. There's an appetite for something. It's like there's an appetite for a meal, and you're served some peanuts and pretzels kind of thing, right? This is what I see in this particular legislation, and I was hoping that perhaps the hon. member could finish his sentence and his thoughts and help us along.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I greatly appreciate those comments and that the member was listening, as always, and put my comments so succinctly, so thank you for that.

Just quickly to finish my thoughts there, reviewing what we saw from the Alberta Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee back in 2020, once again I can appreciate that there were recommendations only partially accepted around the need to

reference a limit on financial expenses and contributions. Again, we don't see that specifically written into this legislation as far as I can tell, and we've been asked to wait for the regulations. But when we talk about something like financing and transparency around campaign contributions and limits, I believe that that's something important enough that it should be in the body of the legislation and not left to regulations after the fact. We also can look at some of the defeated recommendations that our caucus had put forward, including prohibiting third-party advertising and only allowing proponents of the petition and the MLA to advertise. Again, that was not supported by this government, which leaves me to question exactly why this government wants to see the ability of third-party advertising take place.

You know, of course, when we came into government, in 2015, we had put forward Bill 1, which was to ban corporate and union donations. We had made many changes to how voting happens and potentially where it's happening and the ability of people to vote through mail or advance polls and saw significant changes there. I can always appreciate when we are doing our best to strengthen democracy but in this legislation, once again, Madam Speaker, am left with more questions than answers.

We saw that from stakeholders who put forward questions around why the need for differences between municipal councillors and MLAs specifically, questions around the 40 per cent threshold for eligible voters and if that applies to both public and Catholic school divisions. This was coming from chair of the Elk Island public schools.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 52, the Recall Act. English author Richard Adams published *Watership Down* in 1972, which is a story of rabbits escaping the destruction of their warren and seeking a place to establish a new home while encountering perils and temptations along the way. In this story are virtuous rabbits and bad rabbits. We could say that politics is quite similar, that politicians, much like rabbits, encounter perils and temptations throughout their term.

3:40

The difference here, Madam Speaker, is that we aren't rabbits, and people pay much more attention to our perils and temptations. After all, we lead very public lives. The world of politics is not always full of sunshine, blue skies, and fields of sunshine and rhododendrons. The reality is that politicians are human. They make mistakes, and they are prone to failure. Above all they are held to be accountable. There are expectations of elected officials to conduct themselves in the highest regard.

The Recall Act would allow Albertans to initiate a process that could lead to removing and replacing elected officials, including Members of the Legislative Assembly, municipal officials, and school trustees, during their term. Under the Recall Act the recall of an elected official becomes an option 18 months after the respective provincial, municipal, or school board election. An eligible Albertan could begin the process to have their MLA recalled by applying to the Chief Electoral Officer through a petition. Petitions require 40 per cent of the number of electors that are on the post-polling-day list of electors. Additionally, individuals must live in the constituency for at least three months before they can sign the petition. Should this be successful, the recall of an MLA will go through a recall vote by the local constituency. If the constituency votes to recall, a by-election would be held.

I would also like to point out that a recall petition cannot be started less than 18 months after an election, nor can it be started within six months or less of an upcoming election. In the case of municipal officials, Albertans would need to modify – sorry. The chief administrative officer of the municipality. For school board officials they would apply to the secretary of the relevant school board.

Madam Speaker, the Recall Act will strengthen democracy by allowing Albertans to hold elected officials accountable throughout their term, not just during elections. It's imperative that legislators are reminded of their duty to serve the very people who elected them. The reality is that some lose track of their purpose here and neglect those whom they serve. I'm glad to see that the government has put forward such legislation, which fulfills our platform commitments, and most of all I'm proud to support this legislation without reservation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 52, the Recall Act. Now, we've heard from a number of government members today who have spoken about this bill, and I listened with interest to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who spoke and said that we should judge a government by whether they've kept the promises they made.

Now, admittedly, that is a refreshing change of pace, to be able to judge this government by promises it made as opposed to all of the things that they've been doing over the last little while that they have been prioritizing that they never promised or indeed ever told Albertans they intended to do, things like rescinding the 1976 coal policy and allowing strip-mining on the eastern slopes, a promise the government never made and never told Albertans, going to war with doctors in the midst of a pandemic and driving them out of the province, firing 11,000 front-line health care workers, selling off Alberta parks, charging Albertans to access Kananaskis, or forcing Albertans to pay even more income tax, all things this government did not tell Albertans it intended to do but made a priority before taking action on recall elections, which was one of its specific promises in its platform.

And that's not even considering just the promises that they actually broke, things that they promised they would do or would not do and then went ahead and did anyway, things like maintaining the big-city charters with Edmonton and Calgary. Well, they tore those up right quick before they got around to keeping this promise. Or maintaining indexing for AISH: that was a promise this government made and broke. It was a priority for them to deny that income to some of the lowest income people in our province. That was a priority for them before following through on their actual promise to introduce recall legislation. We look at the things that this government has chosen to prioritize that it never said it would do. We look at the things that the government said it would do and promised it would not do and then broke those promises.

I think we also, though, have to consider how they actually keep the promises that they have made. It's nice for them to sort of make a list and check the box, but I think Albertans also want to know: what is in that box? What is the quality of the actual deliverable from this government? After all, they promised Albertans their inquiry into un-Albertan activities, as it were, based on the tinfoil hat conspiracies of one Vivian Krause. Now, that current promise so far is \$1 million over budget, on its fourth extension, and has become an utter embarrassment for our province and our energy

industry, much like their energy war room, another embarrassment that, frankly, I think has caused more problems for our energy industry than it has actually solved, not to mention the fact that it was set up in a way to prevent Albertans from getting any information about what it's actually doing, how it's actually functioning, or how it's spending public dollars, which is somewhat ironic because the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon was talking at length about how he believes the government should be accountable to the people.

I think it's important that we actually look at how this government reportedly fulfills the promises it has made to Albertans. That's not even getting into their key promises of jobs and pipelines and the economy, all three of which this government has fallen flat on its face on in its two years so far in government.

But when it comes to recall legislation, I will say that I certainly have heard – and, I think, for many of the reasons that I've just listed – from a lot of Albertans who have been asking if there's any way they could remove this government before 2023. Certainly, a lot of them have buyer's remorse. I hear that regularly, most recently as I was calling and speaking with folks in the constituency of Calgary-Currie, an awful lot of people there who voted for this government who certainly don't intend to again. Indeed, even some members – well, former members – of this government caucus themselves sought just recently to recall the Premier. They didn't last in the caucus long after that, Madam Speaker. Indeed, we had multiple members of that government caucus openly coming out and opposing their government's policies on something as important as COVID-19, saving and protecting lives. Thankfully, those folks have gone very silent in the last few weeks as we saw the record numbers in hospital and ICU.

Now, in terms, again, of this recall legislation, what this government says is that it's about democracy. So many things this government says it is putting forward in the name of democracy. What does democracy actually look like to this government? It has control over a number of democratic systems and has made a number of changes to them over the last couple of years. Every single time, Madam Speaker, it is about enacting changes that favour themselves: multiple changes to the standing orders in this Legislature to duck accountability, to make it more difficult for the opposition to do their work; using the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills to block every single opposition bill except one while somehow letting through nearly every bill from a government member. That's democracy, in the view of this government. That's the view they bring as they introduce recall legislation, using obscure standing orders to block private members from bringing forward motions that they don't want to talk about. They've made a big deal in the last few weeks about how open they are in their caucus, how much they value free speech, so much so that they are willing to sacrifice the health and, potentially, the lives of Albertans to uphold that principle. But here in the practices of this House, where they have that control, not so much, Madam Speaker.

3:50

That is what we are considering as we consider their bill on recall legislation. We have to consider their changes to the municipal elections act, jamming big money back into the municipal elections process, opening the taps, which, again, is ironic as the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon spoke about the differentiation in this bill between how they treat government MLAs or how they treat municipal officials and school trustees, making the process to recall them easier, putting more barriers in place for an MLA. He claims that's because they didn't want to create problems in terms of finances in terms of municipal elections and trustee elections. They

didn't want to introduce an undue burden, even as this government has introduced legislation which makes it far easier for people to dump more money into those elections. That is the kind of inconsistency we continually get from this government on what they call principles of democracy. This government is looking to put a thumb on the scale to benefit themselves, to benefit their friends and allies, to try to permanently tip the balance of power in this province.

Again, with recall legislation we find that they are leaving so much ambiguous. We don't know how we are going to approach things in recall legislation in regard to expenses, contributions, advertising limits, third-party involvement, all undefined in this legislation. They talk about accountability, they talk about democracy, but they are refusing to be open and transparent about what they are planning to put into place, how this will actually operate, how dollars will be actually spent, what checks and balances are going to be in there to prevent third parties from dumping in money to advance a political agenda against a sitting elected official. Again, the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon said that they don't want dollars to cause a problem in the process for municipal officials and trustees, yet they are not defining how they're going to govern what dollars go in and who is going to be allowed to buy influence in setting up a campaign against an elected official.

You know, the Member for Cardston-Siksika, before we had our three-week break from this House, during which time the government had decided it was too dangerous for them to be here while many other people in the province of Alberta continued to show up and go to work in far more dangerous circumstances – before that, as we were debating yet another one of their changes to the standing orders in this place, supposedly in the name of democracy, he spoke about his deep concern about performative politics, grandstanding without delivering on any actual outcomes. Madam Speaker, that is what I see from this government repeatedly when it comes to bills like this: hollow promises, things that look good on the surface but underneath are empty at best. At worst they are Trojan Horses to smuggle in this government's agenda of putting more money into our political system, more outside influence, of putting undue influence into the democratic process, muddying the waters as opposed to making it clearer and easier for Albertans to access, protecting themselves while trying to tip the scales against those whom they disagree with.

This bill can't be used for 18 months after an election or six months before. That leaves a pretty small window, if any, because, of course, again, we don't know when this bill would actually be proclaimed. That's at the discretion of the minister, when it could actually be applied against any MLA currently sitting in this House. This government could have made that a bigger priority. They could have introduced it sooner. If they truly believe in accountability to the people of Alberta, they could have given them this window, this opportunity, this tool much, much sooner.

Instead, they are waiting and dragging their feet to provide what they call a tool of accountability that can be used against them while, of course, putting in more barriers for it being used against them than any other elected officials in the province of Alberta. Of course, that just matches with the kind of condescension that we have continually seen from this government towards elected municipal officials or school board trustees or indeed duly elected representatives through Alberta's unions. The only democracy that this government apparently respects is that which gives them power. Everyone else they disregard. So, potentially, we have maybe a matter of months out of the four years of this particular Legislature when this bill could actually prove to be functional. I don't call that accountability, Madam Speaker.

There's an awful lot in this bill that is left undefined. There is an awful lot in this bill that this government is asking Albertans simply to trust them on: on how they draft the regulations, on how they set things up. Again, we've already seen how they have chosen to do so in the area of municipal elections, Senate elections, the participation of third parties in those circumstances. That, to me, Madam Speaker, does not bode well for what this government intends to set up in this legislation.

I suppose the one comfort Albertans can take is that, you know, whatever mess this government makes of this legislation, whatever attempts they make to make even more space for that dark money, that big money from third parties and others to get involved in putting a thumb on the scale of the democratic process, it is going to have very little opportunity to be influential before the 2023 election. Perhaps as Albertans look to hold this government to account for its decisions, they will elect a government that will repeal so many of the things that this government has chosen to do that, again, are muddying the waters of our democracy, providing less accountability, creating more noise instead of truly empowering Albertans to have a say in their government, which we have seen through so many of this government's consultations . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to be in this Chamber today and respond to the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. I guess I'll start by saying that he just kind of randomly mentioned my name during his remarks and decided to reference something with no context as to when I said what I said, but I will say this: I disagree with pretty much everything that member said, with good reason, and so do the constituents of Cardston-Siksika. I'll tell you why: because they want recall. They asked for recall. It was something that I campaigned on as a member of the United Conservative Party, and it's something that I believe in as a matter of principle and something that as the former chair of the Democratic Accountability Committee I'm glad we put forward recommendations on and that they are being put into this bill.

In response to the member's remarks, a number of which weren't even germane to the topic of recall, I will talk about the promises. He recited our campaign platform, which, of course, was jobs, economy, pipelines, and it's one that I think we continue to champion as members on this side of the House. But let's talk about it. He had said that those are promises that were not kept, but what other province in this country, coming out of this horrific pandemic that we are currently facing and on the way out of it, is set to see an increase in GDP of 6.4 per cent, which is going to lead the country, Madam Speaker? Those aren't just numbers that I am pulling out of my hat, like the Member for Edmonton-City Centre likes to do with his own remarks. That's from the Conference Board of Canada. If the member wants to argue with those numbers, he's welcome to, but they're there in black and white. He's welcome to go read those.

4:00

Then let's talk about pipelines. It is rich, Madam Speaker, to listen to members from that side of the House talk about defending pipelines. That is one thing we know that members on that side of the House don't support. We understand on this side of the House – and we have the hon. Minister of Energy here to back that up – that we want to see our energy get to international markets. We can do that with pipelines – pipelines east, pipelines west, pipelines south – but for some reason when the members opposite were in

government, they chose to oppose Keystone XL. When it gets kiboshed by the now President of the United States of America, from that side: crickets.

Then let's all move on to the next thing that the member decided to address in his remarks, which, again, were not talking about recall but the private members' bill committee, which was interesting because that member suggests that we have blocked every piece of legislation that comes through there, when, in fact, that is false, Madam Speaker. Bill 214 and Bill 215 were both recommended to proceed to this Chamber and will get their time for concurrence debate, I believe, next week if I'm not mistaken. It's probably worth checking with the table.

Let's rewind a couple of bills to Bill 212, talking about playing politics. Bill 212 was a bill meant to make rodeo Alberta's official sport, and who opposed it? Members opposite, the NDP caucus. Shocker. I really mean that. No sarcasm intended. I was surprised when they opposed making rodeo Alberta's official sport. Why? If the Member for Edmonton-City Centre is going to sit on his high horse and cast aspersions across the aisle to the government side, he might want to get his facts straight. But, you know, it's not uncommon, Madam Speaker.

We're back here in this Chamber, and we are talking about recall, and there are a number of other bills on the Order Paper that we'll be addressing. You know, I hope members on the opposite side will bring fulsome, thoughtful remarks to this debate because we are here for that exact reason, but it is unfortunate that I'm hearing a member from Edmonton, Edmonton-City Centre, who, I would say, traditionally comes well prepared to this Chamber, using information that is incorrect in his remarks and then citing me, specifically me, in his remarks for no apparent reason. While I can appreciate his vigour for this conversation about recall, maybe the Member for Edmonton-City Centre is concerned about his own seat – maybe that's why he opposes recall – and maybe he's not. But I can assure you that whether you're concerned about your seat or not, recall is a good thing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 52, the Recall Act. Albertans already play the most important role in our democracy through electing those who represent them, but Bill 52 seeks to expand this power. In the 2019 election we promised to strengthen democracy. By allowing Albertans to hold elected officials accountable throughout their term, Bill 52 delivers a key part of this important promise.

Bill 52 establishes a process which can be used by Albertans to recall an MLA, municipal official, or school trustee. This bill allows for the recall process to occur at any point after 18 months of the last election and allows for recalls to occur up until six months before the next election.

For the recall of an MLA, Albertans would apply to the Chief Electoral Officer. After the application the petitioners would have 60 days to gather signatures from 40 per cent of eligible voters in the constituency. If the petition is successful, the voters in the constituency would vote to decide if there should be recall. If this vote is successful, the MLA will be removed, and a by-election will be held to elect a new representative.

For the recall of a municipal official, Albertans would apply to the chief administrative officer of the municipality and have 60 days to obtain signatures from 40 per cent of eligible voters in the municipality or ward. If that petition to remove the municipal official is successful, the elected official would be removed once the petition is presented at the next council meeting.

Lastly, Albertans can seek to recall a school board trustee by applying to the secretary of the relevant school board. Petitioners would then need to gather signatures from 40 per cent of eligible voters in the relevant school district within 120 days after approval of the application. If this petition is successful, the official is removed, and the school board would decide if a by-election is necessary. Currently under the Municipal Government Act the Minister of Municipal Affairs can remove an elected official from office under very specific circumstances. Similarly, the Education Act enables the Minister of Education to remove a school board official and a school board to remove a trustee.

No jurisdiction in Canada currently has legislation which provides citizens with the power to remove school board or municipal officials. British Columbia is the only Canadian province with legislation allowing citizen recall of provincial officials. There is no federal legislation allowing for recall of Members of Parliament.

By providing citizens with the ability to recall municipal, school board, and provincial officials, Bill 52 would provide Albertans with the strongest democratic tools of any jurisdiction in Canada. Bill 52 is based on a private member's bill first introduced in 2016 by my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley. It is also based on recommendations made by the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee.

I look forward to supporting this legislation and strengthening the ability for Albertans to keep their elected officials accountable to their constituents. Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up in the House and add my comments to Bill 52, Recall Act, analysis on behalf of my constituents. I think it would have been better coming back to the Chamber after two weeks' shutdown due to the situation, health emergencies, number of Albertans, you know, getting infected, and the growing number of cases and individuals to the hospital and ICUs – even though there is some relief after these two weeks, the danger is still there.

The rate of the COVID-affected cases is still concerning, around 9 per cent and high. Truly, on behalf of my constituents I wanted to say on the record that it would have been very nice if coming to the House on the very first day, we should have been discussing how to control the spread of COVID-19 going forward and discussing the path back to economic recovery and discussing all those small businesses struggling due to these on-and-off shutdowns and COVID-19 challenges and about those people that have lost jobs due to COVID. Unfortunately, this is not the case. As, you know, it's my turn to stand up and add my comments, we are not discussing that issue.

On Bill 52, as many of my colleagues have actually eloquently spoken and explained about this, this bill, you know, looking at the concept, as the UCP is trying to claim, if it would have been an honest and sincere effort, it would have been much better to discuss this bill. But we see, as my colleague already said, a lot of things being proposed in this bill are hypocritical, double standards, not clear, avoiding accountability.

4:10

As a politician I do understand, when I look at the bill, the timing, when it was brought into the House, how it was announced in the media due to the holiday controversies. The UCP government really

wanted to look at something, to use something, again, as a distraction. It was not long ago when this government was elected, in 2019. The government was elected on the issues of jobs, economic recovery. One of the surprising things we saw during that election was the health guarantee signed on cardboard by the current Premier. What have we seen in those two years? Not even a single achievement around those promises, but they were the main promises that were made by this UCP Party during the election.

So Albertans are upset, we are seeing, in a number of ways. The UCP does acknowledge it, but they don't want to learn from it. We have seen backstepping on a number of issues. We are seeing the UCP backstepping on privatization of parks. We have seen, finally, the UCP stepping back on coal mining in the eastern slopes.

Albertans keep speaking. We have seen the teachers – the question was put forward by the opposition leader today. The teachers voted no confidence in the Education minister.

So a number of things. The UCP is losing confidence within Albertans. The people are struggling. People are expecting and people are looking for leadership and looking for help during these unprecedented times. And all we see here are the issues and the propositions of UCP grandstanding. Nothing, in reality, is being delivered. That is the issue.

When we were talking about the Recall Act analysis, there's a lot that has been done in North American jurisdictions. There are obvious facts and proofs of how effective these laws or actions are and how they actually served the very people of, you know, related jurisdictions. There is a minimum, minimum, minimum success.

Even the UCP government members in the special select committee, if I'm not wrong, did raise some concerns about the very high threshold of the – 40 per cent of the people needed to sign to start the process of recalling a member. That seems, like, unheard of. That's not even being debated. What was the government perspective on the very argument that was even made by their own government members in the special select committee?

So the debate here right now is not about the Recall Act. The debate is about how this act will actually do justice, will serve the people that it is intended to serve by this Bill 52, Recall Act, and on top of that would justify politicians. It seems like the government tried to rush on this. As I said, it was not long ago – it was December, the Christmas holidays – when the controversies of the Alohagate holiday season came out in the media, and that was the very moment when we heard the government members or the Premier talking about Bill 52. The reason for doing that was that they wanted to run away from their own accountability. What they wanted to say is that the party, the party caucus, and the leader and the leadership, the Premier, are not responsible for the activities of their members, when we already know that there are set processes and procedures to undertake the caucus work. Instead of taking responsibility, the UCP leader simply announced the bill to create a simple distraction by bringing Bill 52, Recall Act, in the House.

This bill has been discussed before in the House, and there have been referral amendments from the opposition to make it better. But I haven't, you know, heard any government member or minister trying to address all of those issues that were highlighted in the debate, why there is a double standard for the recall of MLAs versus the recall of municipal leaders or recalling school board trustees. I still didn't hear a single answer from the government House members or Executive Council members, so it seems the government is not really serious about this.

That is one of the biggest concerns. If we are serious about this, we really need to come out honestly, with an open heart, and debate this issue. If we are serious about strengthening democracy and empowering our communities and our constituents with these electoral processes, where if they feel that their members are not

representing them, they can be recalled, the biggest part of this bill, that is very concerning as the UCP have moved a number of legislation in the same direction that have opened – in this case, it's quiet about the third-party money influence. This is very important to discuss in the House.

Is there a lack of the parliamentary, what we cannot come out due to during this – I'm just trying to put this. This kind of pattern of work, basically posing the challenges to the parliamentary political system and process and procedures itself – when the people of Alberta or any jurisdiction or country have their elected representatives accountable to them on those very issues, why are the important elements of these bills not being discussed here? Why are they allowed to be implemented by regulations, by bureaucrats?

4:20

Simply, this government is trying to run away from accountability. That comes when we see everything that's being introduced in the House. One way or the other it portrays, demonstrates that the government is just interested in more grandstanding, more election-style rhetoric. They are not serious about actually addressing these issues. That is the very issue. They still haven't learned anything from what had happened in the past two-plus years since the UCP first took office in 2019. Even from April to December 2019 Alberta lost 50,000 jobs. We were not in a pandemic in 2018. A thousand more people are looking for work in Alberta right now. The UCP government is not interested to discuss this, but it's also very obvious. Government is not willing to learn anything from all those facts, challenges.

Bill 52, the other important thing about this bill is that this bill is not widely . . . [Mr. Deol's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I'll thank my colleague for his remarks on this piece of legislation before us. I was hoping the member could talk a little bit more around the different criteria. Recall of MLAs has one set of criteria, fairly rigorous. In fact, we've spoken at length to the fact that there is probably a better chance of winning the lottery than there is of an MLA actually being recalled through this piece of legislation, yet to recall a school board trustee or a member of a city council or of municipal government, there's a different set of criteria. There's one step removed. In fact, it's a much lower bar to remove locally elected officials. I was hoping the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows could comment on and share his further thoughts on maybe why he thinks the government has two sets of standards or, you know, maybe the member might have some intel as far as what the government is afraid of by imposing the same level of restrictions.

We've heard from a number of our colleagues today citing other jurisdictions that have recall legislation and talking about the fact that none have actually been able to effectively recall. In fact, Alberta used to have recall legislation once upon a time until the Premier of the day almost was recalled himself and decided to get rid of it and at that point decided it was a bad idea.

I do find it interesting as well and hope that the member can comment on the timelines within this bill. The government talks about how this was a campaign promise. Well, I don't think Albertans realized that blatantly advertising one thing and doing the opposite – to say that, "Oh, we've brought in recall legislation," well, the way it's written, for members who maybe aren't a part of cabinet, you will see very quickly that this will never in fact recall

any member whatsoever. It was lip service that was paid to Albertans because, actually, as I was talking to some of my colleagues, the number of Albertans that are sending letters and phone calls to our offices saying, “Bring it in tomorrow” – we’ll see how many MLAs do in fact get recalled. I mean, this shouldn’t come as news to any members in this Chamber, but I don’t think members of the NDP opposition are at risk of losing our seats, but I can sure count the number of UCP MLAs that are in real trouble if this recall legislation actually could recall someone and do what it’s meant to do. Instead, we debate a bill that will effectively do nothing but give the government the opportunity to run around the province and say they introduced recall legislation.

I’m hoping my colleague might have a comment or two at least on those two different sets of criteria. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, for asking the question, and Madam Speaker, once again. As the member has said, and I tried to expand on, this legislation itself is very cumbersome. It’s very unlikely to be able to be enforceable given the number of criteria in this bill.

I’m also concerned about this. We don’t know, if this bill is passed, when this legislation will be enforceable. One, this is very obvious, as this government is probably aware, that a number of their MLAs right now are probably on the hook, on the verge during the situation where Albertans are showing a lot of their dissatisfaction about what is happening in Alberta by the UCP government. It’s not even clear. If this bill gets through this House, would it be enforceable, and when would it be enforceable? Would it be enforceable during this government’s term or not? On top of this, it’s very hard to enforce.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 52? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to say a few words in regard to Bill 52, the Recall Act, as it is so called. It doesn’t become an act until it gets voted, but that’s okay.

I share many of the analyses that we have heard from my colleagues here in the Official Opposition this afternoon in regard to how this bill, how it’s been constructed, is duplicitous, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, duplicitous meaning that it speaks of one thing but is deceiving people to think that it’s doing something when it actually, in this case, doesn’t do much at all, really. One area that I would like perhaps to expand on and that we haven’t heard as much on is this whole idea of having other campaigns being run inside of the four-year or three-year term or whatever it is for provincial politics. I’ve seen the UCP have a very strong appetite for doing this. I think they are always looking for ways to get around the investment or spending limits for elections here in Alberta that our government brought in.

I think that they have a covetous eye on changing that, but it’s politically very difficult to change, to take the cap off spending limits because, of course, that seems so obviously deceitful. But if you create other fires elsewhere, so to speak, other campaigns running inside of the term or even simultaneous to other elections without spending limits or controls, then you can literally put the province into a state of constant campaigning with third-party people, corporations and so forth and businesses, putting in large amounts of money to destabilize the political landscape in the province if you choose to do so.

4:30

Again, taking an idea with recall for MLAs, which, you know, is gaining a lot of currency, I must say – I was always sort of ambivalent about it, you know, just because of, mostly, whose mouth it was coming out of, which is these Conservative governments. But, you know, in recent months I’ve really kind of come around to the idea, and the reason that I have done so is that this government, this UCP government, has been governing this province so appallingly and making such poor decisions that I share the sentiments of many Albertans that I’ve been speaking to personally over the last few months in saying that maybe we do need an exit strategy for when we have elected a government that’s just so bad, driving in the ditch, crashing every time, and literally compromising the future of so many people here in the province of Alberta, people that are making choices to try to find other places to live, people that are having difficulty paying money to put together tuition for postsecondary, that are trying to build a future in this province, where we’ve lost more than 50,000 jobs even before the pandemic struck our fine, fine province.

I’ve been hearing people talk about: when can we get rid of this government? I hear it all the time. You know, we’re unable to door-knock because of COVID, so I’ve been on the phones, calling in to different places in Calgary – into Calgary-Elbow, into Calgary-Bow, into Calgary-Varsity, into Calgary-Currie – and the recurring theme, as I say, is: “When can we get rid of this government? How many more months do we have?” It made me think about Bill 52 and say that, well, maybe there’s some merit to it and merit to providing some hope when you have a categorically poor government, for people to say: okay; well, maybe we can exercise some democratic process inside a four-year term of a government to send them a message, basically.

As I had said before, it bears saying again that you see different versions of that same anger: coming out on the weekend with teachers voting 99 per cent, having no confidence in the Minister of Education here in the province, K to 12 education; doctors voting 96 per cent, lack of confidence in the Minister of Health; caucus members inside the UCP speaking out against government policy around COVID restrictions and so forth. I mean, that was in itself quite abhorrent, Madam Speaker, quite frankly, and contributed to, you know, poor health outcomes and dangerous potential health situations around the province. Again, it just kind of shows that general malaise that has pervaded in our province for these last number of months and how we need to regain control.

How do we do that? Well, for one thing, I think we can talk about this bill in a, you know, reasonably perfunctory sort of way, but the main issue, Madam Speaker, is to start talking about getting Albertans back to work. They need jobs, they need to be working, they need that sense of hope for the future. They need to know that the provincial government is here to make an investment to make sure that it’s safe and secure and a place where young families can put down roots and raise their kids, get a good education, and get a good job and a secure future for all.

All of those things at this moment are in jeopardy. Yes, they’ve been exacerbated by the pandemic, but fundamental bad decisions by this UCP government have only laid the foundation to make things so much worse. So maybe there’s some merit to recall, quite frankly. We could say that maybe, you know, we don’t need to just hold our noses and wait till the next term. I mean, if things are so bad, then maybe we do have to have an escape valve, a way to release some of the pressure that we are experiencing here now, a perfect example.

However, when you look at the actual nuts and bolts of what Bill 52 consists of, there are just so many ways in which we find it, I

find it wanting. One, it's almost impossible to conceive that someone within that window of the first 18 months and the last six months, that sort of being blacked out as a recall area – then what does that leave you in regard to actually being able to get signatures of 40 per cent of the electorate in a given constituency to be able to sign on to something like that? Forty per cent: we all know that even when we have a high voter turnout, which we all aspire to, it's very difficult to achieve those levels of participation on one side of an issue. For something that's extraordinary, like recall, again, that sets a bar that's very difficult in a very narrow time constraint, which, I would suggest, is deliberately built to fail.

The whole idea, then, of having another set of rules for another level of elected government only adds to the skepticism that I think many people share around this legislation. Why is there a double standard? Why do we not hold municipal and school board officials to the same bar of what constitutes the admission to move ahead with recall? Again, people look for consistency, people look for a sense of what's naturally fair, and they look for something that they can actually achieve in order to use a tool such as this, such as recall legislation, to bring an elected official back before the people and face judgment. So, you know, all of those things just really make me wonder.

Again, I've come around to this idea of recall, and I've come around primarily by watching what's unfolded across the aisle over the last couple of years, which is, quite frankly, abhorrent, Madam Speaker. I've seen a number of governments in this Legislature as an MLA, and this one is by far the most incompetent and poorly performing that I've ever seen in this House. So recall kind of says: hey. It shines like a beacon of hope, doesn't it? But this isn't it. This piece of legislation is not what we need at this moment.

We will put forward as the very helpful Official Opposition – being constructively critical, we will provide amendments to make sure that perhaps we can build something that is not just acceptable to other members in this House but is functional, that can actually work to provide that option for recall if Albertans choose to exercise it here in the province of Alberta. We will, through the various stages of this bill, work to provide reasonable amendments, amendments that I think can help us to build something that's acceptable and to fill that appetite, I think, that Albertans have in regard to recall.

If you make something and you put a name on it and it serves a completely different function, then it's worse than not doing anything at all. You put a label on something and say, "This is a car; it's an affordable car, it's very nice, and it works very well," and it's not a car and it doesn't work – right? – and you're still trying to sell it as such, then that's worse than not providing anything at all. I would suggest that what we see here with Bill 52 is a word, a concept that's been thrown around for a long time, and beneath that word is a construction of a bill which, at best, I would suggest, is dysfunctional and perfunctory and half put together and, at the very worst, duplicitous and deceitful. Is that strong enough, Madam Speaker? I think that it sets a good tone for this bill.

I look forward to debate, and I look forward to amendments that might come forward to make it more functional. Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I was listening to the hon. member speak about the concerns about the bill, and, of course, as a member of the committee where this bill actually was first discussed, I do believe, as the hon. member was saying, that it has missed the mark of the conversations that we were having.

I also feel that it's important to remind the government that, you know, we're spending the afternoon talking about pieces of legislation that have absolutely nothing to do with the economy, that really are focusing on what the government has determined are priorities for Albertans but what I can clearly tell you are not the priorities of Albertans. The reason we know that they're not the priorities for Albertans is because many Albertans are unemployed right now. Many Albertans are sitting at home worrying about how they're going to pay their mortgages, how they're going to pay their school fees, how they're going to, basically, pay their bills day to day, buy their groceries. Yet today, again, we have spent a good majority of the afternoon talking about recall legislation, and I'm sure as many of those Albertans are sitting at home wondering where the jobs are, they are probably also wondering what their MLA is doing to help them get a job and what kind of signals this government is sending to support the economy at a time where, clearly, the economy has been slowed down, many businesses have been shuttered, many businesses have been struggling due to COVID-19.

4:40

Instead of having a response from this government that will help support those businesses and keep people employed and keep people safe, we have a government who has decided to spend most of their mandate over this session talking about recall legislation, talking about paying fees for public parks, to go camping, looking at how to raise people's property taxes because of the changes to municipalities' funding, and, really, spending the majority of the time talking about anything but the economy and anything but job creation for the province. You know, as we continue to spend the afternoon talking about recall legislation, I would like to remind the government that they ran on jobs and pipelines, and we actually haven't spoken about jobs or pipelines at all today that I've heard of from this government. I haven't seen any initiatives from this government to encourage job creation. I haven't seen any ways of this government coming forward with proposals of legislation that would support those businesses that are struggling with COVID-19, that are worried about keeping their businesses running, worried about how they're going to hire people back or sick pay or any of those sorts of things.

Instead, what we're talking about is a piece of legislation that will not work in actually recalling any member of this place because it is written falsely and would not be able to actually functionally work to recall a member of the Legislature. What I would like to encourage the government to do – and I do see that there are some ministers in this room – is to really reconsider the agenda of the Legislature. Stop talking about recall, start talking about how to get people back to work, start talking about jobs, start talking about the economy, and really start talking about what Albertans want to hear about, which is how they're going to pay their bills every day.

So I would like hear from the hon. member if he has any comments about how he could see this government, you know, supporting Albertans during this economic downturn.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. I appreciate the hon. member's insight to just remind us about what the gravity of the situation is and, you know, in what context are we here after three weeks of not being in the House? Lots and lots of people are saying: "Okay. Well, let's get the House back because we need to deal with immediately pressing issues. My family really needs recall legislation?" Well, you know, I don't think that really equates. I mean, the one recall

that I would like to see as soon as we could – we'll have to wait for the electoral process – is a total recall of the government – that is a movie as well, *Total Recall* – which is a general election when we recall all of the MLAs to see what the public thinks about that. My apologies to Arnold Schwarzenegger in that regard, but I'm sure he would appreciate it, being a democratically elected person at some point as well. [interjection] That's right. There are so many quotes that you could go with from there.

You know, seriously though, Madam Speaker, dealing with the economy, making things stabilize here at this juncture is what our job number one is as elected officials here in the province of Alberta. We need to send some hope and optimism to people, and it can't just be words. It has to be material supports that we see now more than ever.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to the Recall Act. I have heard the remarks offered by the government side in this House, and I think they focused on accountability. They said that that's what they promised to Albertans, and they said that their constituents want this piece of legislation. Over the period of the last three weeks I have had many opportunities to reach out and talk to my constituents, and let me say this. Many of them have talked about recalling this government, but not a single person mentioned or asked me about this recall legislation, especially in the part of northeast Calgary that I represent. I was looking at the COVID map for Calgary, and the area is generally referred to as upper northeast. Upper northeast had a way higher case count in the first wave and the second wave. In the third wave it's again 845 cases per 100,000. That's the area that the Member for Calgary-Falconridge, myself, and the Member for Calgary-North East all represent. I think seeing these kinds of case numbers consistently impacting communities in northeast Calgary, Albertans I represent, my constituents – what they would want to see from this government would be something to address that. We should be talking about the real threat, the real issue facing Calgary, in particular the northeast part of Calgary, for almost over a year now. What we got from this government was that they were just blamed for spreading COVID-19.

What I heard from my constituents was not about recall legislation. What I heard was that the government needs to do a better job of managing this pandemic. The government needs to do a better job of making sure that our communities are safe. The government needs to do a better job of making sure that our workplaces are safe. The government needs to do a better job of making sure that our schools are safe. The government needs to do a better job of making sure that those who are ill have the supports that they need, that they have paid sick leave if they are unable to work. Those are the priorities that I'm hearing in northeast Calgary and not just that.

I think people in northeast Calgary were particularly impacted this year not just because of the pandemic, but also they were hit by the fourth-largest natural disaster in Canadian history. The government did next to nothing to support my constituents. They were told that those natural disasters, especially hailstorms, are covered by insurance. That's why the disaster recovery program won't provide and won't cover their damages. Then we figured out that, no, there was another natural disaster where insurance was available to 13 insurers in Alberta and supports were offered. That was the right thing to do, but for northeast Calgary there was no support offered.

4:50

Now I'm told they are facing other issues as well, Madam Speaker. Those residents in northeast Calgary who have been hit twice with natural disasters: now their insurance companies are cancelling their insurance based on the frequency and severity of their claims. As a result, their insurance costs are going up. Instead of focusing on those issues, on the first day back after three weeks of a break the government chose to debate this Recall Act, which is again of no avail to Albertans who want to recall their MLA, who want to recall this government. If government is sincere in their stated purpose of this legislation, that they want to give Albertans a more direct role in the democracy, they want to make sure that their elected representatives are accountable to the people of Alberta – but what we saw was that 98 per cent of the doctors had a vote of no confidence in this government's Minister of Health, and they call them interest groups. Just last week 99 per cent of the teachers voted in favour of no confidence in the Minister of Education, and their concerns were dismissed. They are just a special-interest group.

Instead of bringing forward this legislation, if the government really wants to do the right thing, they could listen to Albertans, what they have been telling them. Teachers are not just an interest group. They are Albertans. They have an interest in the smooth functioning of our K to 12 school system. Albertans rely on them for their kids' education, and they play a critically important role in our society. They don't need recall legislation to do the right thing and to listen to those teachers. But, no, they didn't.

Our health care system: people who work in health care are our heroes. They are the ones for the last 15 months who have been on the front line of this pandemic. They said that they have no confidence in the Minister of Health of this government. Government doesn't need this piece of legislation to do the right thing, to listen to Albertans, to be accountable to Albertans. If they are really sincere about the purpose of this legislation, if they really want to raise the bar for accountability, if they really want Albertans to have more say in the democratic process, they could do it even without this piece of legislation. They could start listening to Albertans.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Fifty-six out of 61 school boards in Alberta have rejected the curriculum brought forward by this government, if not more – 56 out of 61. Those from business communities that initially endorsed their curriculum, after finding out the details, are pulling back their endorsements as well. It's a near unanimous rejection of this government's curriculum.

If the government really wants to improve accountability, if the government really wants to be accountable to Albertans, they could listen to teachers, parents, business communities, and students and stop attacking them and stop calling them interest groups. But here we have this legislation that sets out a process that may not ever be used for the duration of the 30th Legislature. There are many issues, there are many key details that are unclear and are left to be decided by the cabinet via regulations.

As many of my colleagues indicated earlier, this bill sets different standards for different levels of government. It has a different standard for MLAs, a different standard for municipal and school board trustees. If we are talking about accountability, why can't we have the same standard, a consistent standard that applies to this House, that applies to municipal government, that applies to school board trustees? Why do we need to create a differential standard? No one from the government has been able to give any convincing reasons or any reason, for that matter, for why that differential standard is necessary. In a democratic system, if we are talking

about accountability, I think the same standard should apply to all elected officials. But in this case, with this legislation, that's not the case.

For MLAs in particular, Members of the Legislative Assembly, they're proposing a three-step process, which is a very difficult bar to . . .

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

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a second time]

Bill 64 Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Sabir moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 64, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment May 25: Ms Sigurdson speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has 11 minutes remaining.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

5:00

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, and in particular the current referral, which we are considering. Now, we are at this point referring, I believe, suggesting that we delete all words after "that" and instead state that this bill should be sent to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

I think there's good reason for this, Mr. Speaker. We've had a lot of discussion around the concerns about how this government has chosen to act in regard to the wild areas and the public spaces in our province, our parks and wilderness areas, that are so important and so valuable to Albertans. We've talked at length about this government's decision to rescind the 1976 coal policy and allow strip mining in the eastern slopes of the Rockies, and we saw what a massive push-back it took from Albertans to get this government to turn around on that issue. We saw how they have approached consultation on issues regarding our public lands, regarding the wilderness areas, that Albertans care so much about, which we are discussing here in this bill. In the consultation that they then put out, the online consultation, they tried to tilt the questions as heavily as possible to get the answers they wanted to hear, and Albertans were not going to have it, because they care so deeply about their public lands, about our wilderness areas that they are simply not going to accept that from this government. They resoundingly rejected this government's agenda in that regard.

We have seen, when we are talking about parks and places where Albertans go to recreate in this province, again, that Albertans simply are not willing to accept that the government would attempt to sell some of those parks, create a commodity of those things which we hold collectively as Albertans and which so many

Albertans took the opportunity to go out and enjoy this past weekend, the May long weekend.

Indeed, I had the opportunity to go out to Elk Island park, which, of course, is a national park, but still it was wonderful, Mr. Speaker, I can say, to see so many Albertans out there enjoying those spaces. In particular, what really warmed my heart was the incredible diversity of people I saw there. Many clearly new Canadians were out celebrating and enjoying their Canada Day. Pardon me: their May long weekend. The Canada Day long weekend is coming, and many people enjoy the parks then, too, but of course this was the May long weekend, the Victoria Day long weekend. It was clear that for many of them this was an affordable way for them to get out and celebrate with their family, to enjoy a beautiful space, something, again, that we own collectively together.

Now, what we have here in Bill 64 is this government choosing to make, again, some changes that they didn't tell Albertans they were going to make. We've heard them talk at great length about how proud they are to follow through on their promises. They did not tell Albertans that they intended to do this, Mr. Speaker, to charge Albertans for access to the Kananaskis. That's an announcement that has been made since this bill was brought into the House, and this bill, this legislation, would be required in order for them to enact that, that step they want to take. Again, this is something on which they did not campaign, on which they have not consulted Albertans.

Certainly, this is a government that is more than happy to direct large amounts of public money to their pet projects, which we've already had the chance to discuss today: their inquiry, which is now \$1 million over and four extensions in, multiple months past the original deadline; their embarrassment of an energy war room; all of their pet projects and things that they are using for their political grandstanding. Then they turn to Albertans and say: you need to pay more for the things that you've always had, that you own collectively such as accessing the Kananaskis. I'm sure that over this long weekend, as I saw so many folks from here in Edmonton and area that were out enjoying Elk Island national park, there were many, many people from Calgary who took that opportunity of this long weekend to go out and enjoy the Kananaskis.

Indeed, I mentioned earlier that I had the opportunity to do some phoning to talk to folks about some of their concerns in Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Klein, and some other areas, and this is something that has come up repeatedly, Mr. Speaker. When I talk to folks and I ask them what their thoughts are on the current government and what concerns they might have, a number of people have specifically identified the fact that this government is deciding to move forward with charging them for access to the Kananaskis as a serious bone of contention with this government, particularly after, as I said, which they also frequently mention, the decision to try to sell Alberta parks or to open the eastern slopes of the Rockies for strip mining. These are things on which Albertans are deeply concerned and on which they are frustrated with this government for turning a deaf ear to their voices.

Perhaps nothing illustrates that quite as well as the announcement that we saw last week that Environment and Parks had in fact issued an RFP for drones, Mr. Speaker, to spy on Albertans as they were using public lands, this from a government that talks about standing up for freedom. When we are talking about Bill 64, Mr. Speaker, Public Lands Amendment Act . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives
Language Causing Disorder

Mr. Schow: I suspect the Member for Edmonton-City Centre saw this coming: makes false allegations, imputes false or unavowed motives, and language likely to create disorder. Though not directed at a specific member, the member suggested that the government put out an RFP with the intent of spying on Albertans. This was retracted very quickly. I think this very clearly outlined that this is not the case, is not the intent of the government. For the Member for Edmonton-City Centre to suggest this is the case is completely out of order and certainly caused disorder in the Chamber. I hear members opposite laughing, but the reality is that the only thing laughable is their record in this province, Mr. Speaker. I ask that you have that member retract that unsubstantiated claim made in this Chamber.

The Speaker: I'm not sure if anyone wants to provide additional comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Deputy Government House Leader . . .

Mr. Schow: The deputy whip.

Mr. Sabir: The deputy whip in his comments said that it was done for a little while and that then it was retracted very quickly, because Albertans were concerned that they might be spied on and all those things. It's not a point of order. It's just referring to a government action, just in the last week or so, that the government tried to do, and then they retracted it based on the concern that my colleague mentioned and that Albertans share about the government. I don't think it's a point of order.

The Speaker: I would concur. This is not a point of order.

I would find some difficulty making a connection of an RFP to a recall piece of legislation, but perhaps the member was just merely going – oh, Bill 64. Correction.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Debate Continued

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate your caution. Indeed, I think it is pertinent in that we are discussing Bill 64, about public lands, so certainly an RFP which was intended to include the detection of campfires, off-highway vehicles operating in restricted areas, gatherings of 10 or more individuals, and officer safety support is not far from what I've precisely described as we are discussing a bill about the use of public lands.

5:10

Now, I appreciate that the government did back down much more rapidly on this particular initiative, that again raised the outcry of Albertans, than they have on many others, so I will at least give them credit in that respect. But, again, I think that there is a fundamental disconnect between this government's perception of how Albertans value their parks, their wild spaces, their public lands and how this government seems to view them as something to potentially be exploited for profit, as has continually been the case through the policies and legislation that they have brought forward.

Now, again, we have raised the issue on this of why the government has repeatedly claimed that any revenue they raise from this will go directly back into the parks, will go directly back into these spaces, into maintaining these areas yet is making no

commitment in the actual legislation to doing so. What this government is in effect saying to Albertans is: "Trust us. Trust us. This money that we collect and that we charge you for the use of these public lands, for the use of the Kananaskis, for the use of these other camping areas: we won't use that for anything but doing maintenance and work in these areas." I think we have seen time and again, Mr. Speaker, just how much trust this government deserves.

In our debate on the previous legislation I went through a lengthy list of promises this government has broken, of things it has done that it said that it would not do, of things that it has done that it did not tell Albertans it intended to do. I've talked, again, on this bill and on the bill previous, about the way this government approaches consultation, on the way it hides information from Albertans. This is not a government, Mr. Speaker, that has proven itself worthy of that trust. Indeed, despite the fact that back in January we had two of the ministers of this government stand and say that they intended to earn back Albertans' trust, that they were going to prove themselves to be a government of integrity, we have seen very little from them to back that up.

In this case, to say that Albertans should trust them that when they charge them for the use of these public lands, they are going to only use those dollars to put back, to benefit the same land that it's being taken from without any provision that would actually require this government to do so, I think, is asking too much, which is why we are putting forward this referral amendment right now to say: let's take the opportunity to send this to committee. Let's take the opportunity to bring this to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and have actual consultation with Albertans, not a skewed government survey, not the kind of consultation that we've seen called out today by indigenous leaders on the educational curriculum, where they show a little bit of something and then claim that as support for the whole, not the kind of dishonest approach we have seen from this government on so many of the ways in which it has claimed to consult and communicate with Albertans.

Let's take this to a standing committee, where the conversation can be held directly in public, where we can hear from Albertans themselves, where we can hear from the folks who use and recreate on this land, where we can hear directly from the individuals who will be impacted by this decision. If the government indeed has the support, as it claims, of groups that are themselves invested in and have put their own time and effort into preserving these lands, then certainly we can hear from them there, too, on the record. Again, it has become abundantly clear that when this government quotes somebody and says, "See, they support us," that should be taken with several grains of salt. That needs to be deeply questioned and examined, because this is not a government that is playing straight with the people of Alberta. This is a government that puts its own political agenda ahead of what Albertans actually want and indeed, far too often, Mr. Speaker, of the good of this province.

Questions remain, too, as to what kinds of limitations on the kinds of fees the minister could impose: how high can these fees go? That would be a worthy topic of discussion at the standing committee, to talk about what the genuine costs are, to talk about what is actually needed, how this should be structured, how this government should be held accountable, any future government should be held accountable for the fees they put in place and how those dollars are used.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when some members of this government sat in opposition, they would have been tearing their hair out at the idea that the government would collect a fee from Albertans with no guarantee of where those dollars would go – the words "slush fund" were ones that they loved to toss around – but indeed they are happy to do that when it is their choice and their

decision. They are happy to give themselves that power and authority and, frankly, any future government. That is the Pandora's box they are choosing to open here.

We would have the opportunity at committee to discuss what kinds of socioeconomic impacts this might have. How will this affect families in Calgary, which is struggling right now with the economic downturn, where we have had record unemployment, where the impacts of COVID-19 and this government's decision to continue to pit the economy against public health and utterly fail on both have had such a devastating impact on so many individuals? How is it going to affect them and their ability to enjoy these spaces?

The Speaker: My apologies to the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre. I confused the bill that we were on.

Is there anyone that would like to join the debate under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Anyone have a brief question or comment for the member?

Seeing none, on the referral, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this afternoon to speak to the referral for Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021. I think this is something that needs to happen. We need to take this bill and refer it to the Committee on Resource Stewardship and have an actual discussion about what is happening for Albertans right now.

I've heard throughout this debate several comments from the government that are somewhat concerning. You know, I heard a member of the government say that Albertans wanted this fee, that they asked for this. Well, I can tell you that when I'm talking with constituents, they absolutely did not ask for this. They're asking for support and for ways to get through this pandemic. They're looking for ways to be able to have a paid sick leave. They're looking for ways to keep their businesses open, for live music venues to be able to remain open, for actual support, not for fees. We are in the middle of a pandemic, and people are struggling. Albertans are struggling.

There are so many restrictions that are impacting people's financial revenues, that are impacting people's mental health. One of the things that many Albertans look forward to is the beautiful weather, the beautiful landscapes that Alberta has to offer, and the ability to be a road trip away from an escape, and now this government is proposing fees to access public lands. I think that if we were to refer this to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, we would actually hear from Albertans what those impacts could be.

5:20

I know that when we're talking about fees, this government likes to silo them. They don't want to talk about all of the things that they've introduced, all of the financial hardships that they've introduced. They want to talk about this one thing, so they're talking about it in terms of an isolated increase, an isolated incident where they're asking Albertans to pay more. Mr. Speaker, that absolutely is not the case. We have been inundated with concerns from people that are struggling to make payments on their car insurance, that's skyrocketing right now because they removed the caps that our government had put in place. People are outraged by the cost of their utility bills because of the decisions that this government has made.

We're in the middle of a pandemic, where people are financially struggling. They're physically struggling with their health, their mental health, their physical health. One of the ways that people can have some sort of sense of normalcy at an affordable cost is

getting out into Alberta and camping and accessing these public spaces, and now to enforce a fee – to be clear, we don't know where it's going, other than general revenue – is somewhat concerning. I think that having this referred to committee would allow this government to hear first-hand from Albertans about what the impact of this really could be. You know, I'm curious if this government has done any sort of socioeconomic impact studies on how this increased fee impacts families. Have they talked to families who go out camping and have this as an affordable getaway?

Have they talked to travel and tourism when it comes to promoting travel within the province and what potential restrictions that could mean because people can't afford the fee that is being introduced by this government? I know that this government talked a lot about wanting to support the travel and tourism industry. In a time when travel is restricted, you have to be creative, and I think that having a presentation from the travel and tourism industry in the committee would be wonderful. It would be beneficial. They would be able to articulate ways that they can support money coming in in a way that is beneficial to all. I can't imagine that travel and tourism would say: yeah; let's charge fees to Albertans, and that will increase travel and tourism. Absolutely not. That absolutely does not make sense.

I know, being the cultural critic, that there have been questions about this fee and how it impacts the film crews that want to come in and use our beautiful landscapes as part of their backdrop for their projects. Do they have to pay? Is that going to encourage film producers to come in, if there is a fee affiliated with using that? They talk about encouraging investment. They want to attract investors into this province. Increasing fees: that certainly does not entice anybody to come into our province and use this beautiful scenery that we have, that has been used so many times. I'm sure everyone in this room can talk about a movie that they watched where they were able to see the Kananaskis landscape, see our beautiful mountains. I would imagine that the film industry would love to come to committee to talk about the impacts that their industry has and what it means to have a fee affiliated with using that.

When we're trying to attract investors into our province, when we're trying to say, "Hey, come here; come to Alberta; look at all that we have to offer," I can't imagine that you're bragging about the fees that are affiliated with enjoying our beautiful province. It just doesn't make sense. We want to be able to say: "Come enjoy our province. Go out safely. Go out and enjoy the many things that this province has to offer." But there's a fee, and I think that when we're asking for the government to refer this to committee, we can hear all sides of it. We can hear from Albertans. We can hear from industries, like travel and tourism, like film, that use our beautiful landscapes in their industries and promote, but I can't imagine, when they're promoting travel and tourism, saying: "Come on in. Come to Alberta. Come enjoy our beautiful lands, but we're going to charge you for it." I can't imagine that that's something that people are going to say in this committee.

It is a little bit concerning to me when this government isn't considering this referral. What do they not want to hear? What are they afraid to hear? I know what I'm hearing, and it's concerns and questions. Why is this government coming after families that can barely afford to make ends meet, that are trying to comply with the restrictions? Being outside in this province is an option, but it might not be an option if people have to pay for it. Have they considered doing that socioeconomic impact on what it means to families, the people that you are going to be charging?

Can they answer to Albertans about why this fee that they're proposing is going into general revenue? We talk about all of the

intentions of this fee, of monitoring and making sure that there's efficient waste management and that there's some sort of insurance that the spaces are well kept and maintained. Those are all wonderful reasons, but there is absolutely nothing in this legislation that ties the fee to providing those services. It goes into general revenue. What are the government's positions with that? Has the minister of travel and tourism and jobs and whatever else he's responsible for had insight into this?

Has he gone back to film and said, "This is what's going to happen"? I'm hearing that he hasn't, that there has been no consideration for the impact on the film crews. This would be a wonderful opportunity for that industry to come to committee to propose some solutions. It might be an opportunity to hear other ways that we could promote our parks and have revenue coming in, let's say, through the film industry. They have an incredible economic impact on our province when it comes to jobs, but creating a fee: that's deterring potential projects from coming here when they can go to B.C. and have access there for free.

I think that having been a chair – I was chair for Resource Stewardship. Having the ability for those that are impacted – Alberta families, industry, travel and tourism, film – to come to committee to explain to them what this piece of legislation could do and perhaps unintended consequences might give this government an opportunity to rethink what they're doing. On one hand, they're saying that they want to increase travel and tourism, they want to increase film industry, they want to attract investment into the province, but they're doing things like increasing fees or creating fees that are having the opposite effect of, I'm sure, what they say they want to do and want to accomplish.

But it goes back to their narrative of a campaign commitment, and when I hear members of the government saying that, it seems completely tone-deaf to what's actually happening in the province right now for Albertans. People are struggling. To have your partisan mandate take priority over what Albertans are actually going through is really, really disturbing. It's a complete cognitive disconnect about what is actually happening and what their agenda is.

I can't imagine that when it comes to a campaign promise, people believe that there would be a fee for accessing public lands, especially in a pandemic, when families are financially struggling. There's hardship. I have people calling my office crying, wanting to access resources like food banks, wanting to know if there's some way that they can get some sort of support for their small business that is going to go under, wanting to know if they have access to some sort of leave if they get COVID and have to stop going in to work. These are what Albertans are talking about. They're not asking for a new fee to be able to go out and enjoy Alberta's beautiful outdoors.

5:30

You hear people talking about the refuge that they seek in being outside. When you're in your home, working from home, your children have been doing schooling from home, being able to get outside and enjoy Alberta shouldn't be a luxury afforded to those that can afford it. It should be something that every Albertan should be able to access without fear of cost and without fear of not being able to actually get their family on a vacation or some sort of break because they can't afford the fee that's been included in that.

Mr. Speaker, this is a request that makes sense. Having it referred to committee, Resource Stewardship, gives this government an opportunity to listen to what Albertans are talking about, to listen to what industry is talking about, and I know there are solutions there. I know that there are so many individuals that have come to so many members of our caucus with solutions for how to work

through this pandemic. They want to be part of the solution. They're just not being listened to, and a committee is the perfect opportunity to allow those that have solutions to come in and share them.

I see committee as a way to have experts and members of the public come in and talk about solutions. It's not just a way to come in and complain. There is actual progress that can be done in committee, and as a former chair of Resource Stewardship it's really a great opportunity to engage Albertans in the solution. People want to help by nature. They want to be part of the solution. They want to come up with a way that supports families and industry and tourism. Giving them the opportunity to come and present, whether it's virtually or in writing – I think having this supported in this Chamber would be wonderful, and I really request that all members of this Assembly really think about what we're asking.

It's a simple referral to a committee to further discuss, to have further insight, further feedback about ways that this government can perhaps support Albertans in being able to access low-cost, free recreation and further entice industry in coming here and making investments in our film and travel and tourism.

For that, Mr. Speaker, I would just ask that everyone support this. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen to provide a brief question or comment.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for her comments and laying out her arguments against this bill. I, too, found it quite striking that the government claims that the revenue that'll be brought in from these new fees, which – you know, Albertans know that increasing fees is no different than increasing taxes. The government talks about how they don't increase taxes, but we see at every turn that they, in fact, have, I mean, beginning with the increase of personal income taxes on every Albertan through bracket creep, which the Premier and the leader of the UCP campaigned against when he was the Alberta head of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, claiming then that bracket creep is an increase in taxes. My, oh my, how times have changed, where suddenly that's acceptable and it's not a tax increase. Well, Albertans know that it is.

They also know that their insurance rates have gone up. They also know that costs on many different services and goods that Albertans rely on have in fact increased under this UCP government. Albertans are quite frustrated with this new fee to visit a park that many people have visited year after year with their family. Now, I appreciate the fact that there is a cost to maintaining the park and that with increased volumes of tourists, there will be likely increased clutter, litter, et cetera.

I would argue that Albertans pay taxes, and they pay taxes to be able to have the ability to visit places like parks. I loved when the Government House Leader talked about the national parks and how much it costs for a yearly membership. Well, news flash to the minister: that gives Canadians access to over a hundred parks. Comparing an all-access pass to parks all over the country to being the same as paying for access to one park is ridiculous. It's apples and oranges.

But I think the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was very correct in talking about the fact that this bill is another demonstration of how this UCP government says one thing and then does a complete one-eighty or contradicts themselves, talking about wanting to attract tourists to Alberta. Let's hit them with a fee, because that'll cause people from other jurisdictions to want to flood to Alberta now that

they have a new-found fee. At a time when people are reluctant to get on a plane to go to further distances, why aren't we encouraging British Columbians and people from Saskatchewan to come to Alberta to spend their money here?

What this government doesn't understand is that the hoteliers, the restaurateurs, the small businesses benefit from this increase in volume in tourism, yet now they have a disincentive to come to Alberta. It's frustrating to see that the government not only is playing this new-found fee; they didn't consult with anyone on this. I'd love for someone to jump up and talk about how it's in their platform, hosing Albertans. I didn't see that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm opposed to the way they went about this. Members on the other side of this House have spoken until they're literally blue in the face about things that our government did without consulting Albertans. I'd love for the government to name who they consulted with on increasing fees to use parks and how many Albertans stood up and said: that's a great idea; let's do it. Now, again, I appreciate the fact that Albertans recognize that there is a cost. I would argue that that's why we pay taxes for services, which we're not getting under this government.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Standing Order 29(2)(a). Is there anyone else wishing to speak to amendment REF1?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:39 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Sabir
Carson	Goehring	Shepherd
Deol	Gray	Sweet

Against the motion:

Aheer	Jones	Sigurdson, R.J.
Allard	Long	Singh
Amery	Lovely	Smith
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Nally	Stephan
Copping	Neudorf	Toews
Dreeshen	Nicolaides	Toor
Fir	Nixon, Jason	Turton
Goodridge	Nixon, Jeremy	van Dijken
Gotfried	Panda	Walker
Hanson	Savage	Williams
Horner	Schow	Yao
Issik	Schulz	Yaseen

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

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

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