



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, June 7, 2021

Day 110

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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| Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC) | Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC) |
| Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC) | Nicolaides, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC) |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC) | Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP) |
| Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind) | Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC), Government House Leader |
| Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP) | Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC) |
| Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP) | Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP), Leader of the Official Opposition |
| Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP) | Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC) |
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| Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader | Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP) |
| Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP) | Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC) |
| Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC) | Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (Ind) |
| Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP), Official Opposition Whip | Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC) |
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| Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC) | Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP) |
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| McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC), Deputy Government House Leader | Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC) |

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 3

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| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Goehring
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Sigurdson, L.
Sigurdson, R.J.

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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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Loewen
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Turton
Yaseen

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, June 7, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing for the playing of our national anthem.

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: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly today guests of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, a group of parents: Shannon Kowal, Shauna Kit, Sheila Stemmerger, and their children, who have joined us at the Legislature this afternoon to see us in action.

Lastly, it is with sadness and joy that I introduce to members of the Assembly a friend to many members and cabinet ministers alike on her last day of service here at the Assembly. Please rise. My favourite Mozeson, Jamie Mozeson.

Ministerial Statements

India's 75th Anniversary of Independence

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker and hon. members, namaste. I'm truly grateful to Albertans, who elected me twice to this Legislature and gave my family every opportunity to pursue our Canadian dream. Our family loves Alberta, and we will remain loyal to Alberta forever. Every day I pray for the well-being of Albertans by saying [Remarks in Sanskrit], which means: let everybody live happily and peacefully.

Today from the floor of this House, or, as I like to call it, our temple of democracy, and alongside my friend the minister of culture and multiculturalism, I want to speak about the 75-week-long celebrations that have begun to mark the 75th anniversary of the world's largest democracy, [Remarks in Sanskrit], my ancestral homeland, India. [Remarks in Sanskrit] means: the world is one family. The verse is from the *Maha Upanishad*, which is engraved in the entrance hall of the parliament of India. It says that everyone who comes into the world is born equal and has an equal right to everything in life, but the success of every individual depends on how we pursue the common good.

Indians believe in unity and diversity. There are many mini-Indias within India, and her national anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, reflects all regions of Bharat Mata: 28 states and eight union territories. The country has an incredible 22 official languages and dozens of additional dialects. India's national anthem was in fact penned and put to music by a true Renaissance man, Rabindranath Tagore, who in 1913 became the first man on the continent to win the Nobel prize. Another song of his was adopted by Bangladesh as its national anthem, and he deeply influenced the national anthem of a third country, Sri Lanka.

Most foreigners who have never visited India cannot really gauge how vast and how diverse the country is. The cuisine changes every 200 miles you travel in any direction; the language and the dialect are different every 300 miles; and cultural nuances shift subtly as you travel across the length and breadth of the country. This makes each state in India unique. The culture and history of southern India, where I was born, is quite different from that of the western states, where I migrated to live and work before coming to Canada. Meanwhile in northern India Prasad is a common last name while the name Panda has origins from the east. Through all the uniqueness that one encounters in each region of India, there is an underlying Indianness which binds that country of 1.35 billion people together.

To many foreigners India is synonymous with the Taj Mahal in Agra; beautiful, snow-clad mountains in Kashmir; and sun, sand, and fun in Goa; but, Mr. Speaker, India is a lot more than that. History tells us that the world's first republic was born in India. Elected governments ruled principalities like Vaishali, now part of the state of Bihar, a full century before these concepts took root in ancient Athens. Apologies to the Minister of Advanced Education. This political culture remained alive in hundreds of thousands of villages in India, which continued to elect their village leaders and councils through the millennia.

Perhaps that's why democracy found it so easy to take root in modern India when it gained independence in 1947. Today those village-level democratic functionaries represent the world's largest group of elected officials. Mr. Speaker, it's over 3 million elected officials, and by law at least a third of them must be women. Even now the world stares in awe every five years when 880 million people go out and vote to elect a government that becomes responsible for the well-being of one-sixth of humanity. This is the world's ultimate celebration of democracy. Even as a proud Calgarian I don't hesitate in saying that that is the greatest show on the Earth.

India is a country where people belonging to the Hindu religion make up an overwhelming 80 per cent of the population, yet this is a society that gave rise to four great world religions: Hinduism, of course, as well as Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Buddhism is the fourth-largest religion in the world. This is the society that hosts what is believed to be the oldest mosque outside the Arabian peninsula, believed to have been built by Muslim merchants in Kerala state in the lifetime of the Prophet. This is a society where St. Thomas the Apostle came with the message of Christ in the first century.

Growing up there, I learned [Remarks in Sanskrit], which means: those who protect and uphold the dharma are protected by the dharma. In this case dharma implies compassion, love, kindness, respect, forgiveness, truth, peace, nonviolence, and other noble ideals such as protecting religious minorities and providing them with equal opportunities. Hindustan has sheltered religious refugees from so many different spiritual traditions: Jews fleeing the destruction of the temple of Solomon by the conquering Romans in 70 AD and centuries later the Inquisition in the medieval era, Zoroastrians fleeing persecution in historical Iran, the Dalai Lama

fleeing oppression in Tibet, and, as we speak, Sikhs targeted by the terrorism in Afghanistan.

1:40

India is an ancient country. It is the only country to have a continuous culture that is 5,000 years old. The world's oldest living city is in India, Varanasi. Some of the world's oldest languages and texts are Indian. Yet India is also the world's youngest nation; 65 per cent of Indians are under 35 years old. It is the effort and education of this population that has made India the back office of the world and one of the world's leading knowledge economies. While it is vibrant and young, India's various levels of government need to invest in modern health and education infrastructure and eradicate the red tape that plagues too many institutions and the corruption of too many officials. While no doubt a great nation, few would argue that the country has reached its full potential.

India is rich in human resources, and Alberta is rich in natural resources. In the last six years I have worked hard to explore partnership opportunities between Alberta and India and create prosperity for both. Many Indian students pursue their studies in Alberta's universities and colleges. Recently we have seen Infosys and Mphasis making large investments in Alberta in an endorsement of policies our government is pursuing with Alberta's recovery plan. I'd like to help our Premier and the minister of jobs and economy in their work on that front, and I'm optimistic that India's many biotech, pharma tech, agtech, and other info tech companies will soon find reason to invest in Alberta and make Alberta the Silicon Valley of Canada. There are tremendous synergies that exist between our two countries. I believe that with a little common sense, some hard-nosed business acumen, and political will, we can forge an incredibly strong, mutually beneficial relationship.

On that note I would like to thank the hard-working Indian diaspora who have contributed to enriching both Alberta and Canada. I would like to note that beyond Canada's borders, the Indian diaspora is also contributing as government and business leaders around the world, notably: the Prime Minister of Portugal, the vice-president of the United States, both the President and Prime Minister of Mauritius, both the President and vice-president of Guyana, the President of Suriname, the Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland, many ministers in the U.K., Singapore, Malaysia, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Fiji, New Zealand, South Africa. Mr. Speaker, it would take too long to name them all. On the business side of things people of Indian ancestry are CEOs of major companies like Microsoft, Google, IBM, ArcelorMittal, FedEx. The companies these CEOs manage handle trillions of dollars. Again, it would take too long to name them all, but I will table that at a later time.

Mr. Speaker, as we watch the terrible devastation that has been wrought by the pandemic in India, I urge them to invest in hospitals, schools, universities, railways, roads, ports, and other vital infrastructure that will allow them to respond to the growing needs of their population. Our two countries will continue to be great trading partners, tied together by our mutual economic benefit and shared culture. Happy 75th birthday, India. [Remarks in Sanskrit] God bless Alberta and India.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and provide this response on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadows. Next year on August 15 we will mark 75 years of Indian independence from British colonial rule. Beginning

March 12, 2021, the Indian government launched a 75-week-long celebration called Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav leading up to this momentous occasion on August 15, 2022, and these celebrations will continue another year after that, until August 2023. India's Independence Day reminds the country's citizens of all the selfless sacrifices made by freedom fighters to secure India's future.

India was ruled by Britons starting in 1757, when the English East India Company gained control over the entire country by winning the battle of Plassey. They were under British colonial rule until 1947. The voices against colonial rule and its brutality began to rise and form into a mass movement for independence in the 1850s with the Indian rebellion of 1857. Following this, there was a rise of organized movements due in part to the emergence of Indian leadership at both national and provincial levels and the rediscovery of India's indigenous history. The formation of Indian National Congress in 1885 resulted in it becoming the nation's leader in this independence movement.

The horrific and brutal Jallianwala Bagh massacre on April 13, 1919, caused much resentment and flared the anger among the people. The Indian revolutionary movement began gathering momentum at the start of the 20th century, with the most notable rising in Baghal, Punjab, and the northeastern states. These movements also made their way to Indian societies as far away as Paris, London, San Francisco, Vancouver, and many other countries in the world. This became the Ghadr movement. March 12, 1930, saw the emergence of a Gandhian movement, the satyagraha, which slowly began to absorb all the different revolutionary groups, resulting in a massive civil disobedience movement. The selfless sacrifices made by many martyrs like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru shook the whole nation and united the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs to fight against colonial rule.

On August 8, 1942, the Quit India movement began in response to Gandhi's call for immediate self-rule by Indians and against sending Indians to World War II. In August 1947 British India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. With the quick passage of the Indian Independence Act on the 14th of August, Pakistan was declared a separate nation. On August 15, 1947, India became a sovereign and democratic nation. Independence Day is a reminder of the sacrifices of our valiant freedom fighters, who stood up against the colonizers and suffered harsh consequences unflinchingly so that later generations could breathe in free air.

Recently India has had to fight with one of the worst COVID-19 variant waves, in which thousands of people lost their lives. My heartiest condolences and sympathies are with their families. It was great to witness the whole international community, including Canada, come forward to help the people of India.

Lastly, I would like to conclude by saying that it is the spirit of inclusion and sense that the whole world is one family which will help us break any land barriers and stand together with each other in our hour of need, and, yes, that was the vision of the freedom fighters as well. Happy 75th Independence Day in advance.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

Seniors

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, each year we declare the first full week of June as Seniors' Week in Alberta. It's a tradition dating back 35 years. This year Seniors' Week kicks off today, Monday, June 7, and continues through June 13. Seniors' Week is our opportunity to recognize and celebrate seniors and their enormous contributions to our families and our communities. We owe them so much. We owe so much to our seniors and their decades of work and the building

of our province. Seniors are important to each and every one of us. They are not only parents and grandparents; they are colleagues at work, good friends, dedicated volunteers, and wise mentors.

Seniors are working longer and devoting more hours than ever volunteering and making enormous contributions to the success of our communities. In Lethbridge the Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization and the Nord-Bridge Seniors Centre continue to invest and provide volunteer opportunities in a place where seniors can connect. I would like to highlight the excellent work seniors have done throughout the pandemic, working together to support each other, their families, and those in need of extra care. This great province has benefited immensely from our seniors' past contributions and continues to thrive thanks to their continued support and hard work.

As we start to see the end of the pandemic, we should salute the many seniors who have endured this difficult time with grace and fortitude. These past 15 months seniors have been among the most adversely affected by this pandemic. The extra stress this has brought along with everyday challenges and rising costs on fixed incomes, access to prescriptions, food, and care has been extremely difficult for them. Additionally, having to go months on end without seeing family or close friends has been a heavy burden to bear.

We need to recognize the contributions of seniors now more than ever, so this week I strongly encourage everyone to celebrate the seniors in your life and in your community. Reach out, connect, care for, and thank wonderful seniors in our lives. They have helped build this province into what it is today. They have fought and died for it, and they have stood and lived for it. Needless to say, thanking you is only a small token of the appreciation you deserve. Happy Seniors' Week.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

UCP Members' Edmonton Federal Building Gathering

Ms Notley: Quote: we never broke the rules; it was a working dinner; Jamesons is not the finest whisky. Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier gave every excuse he could think of to try and justify breaking the very rules he was asking Albertans to follow. Now, because the Premier can't tell right from wrong, it's taken six days of public outrage and outspoken MLAs for the Premier to apologize after both he and his staff mocked Albertans who were so rightfully disappointed by his behaviour. Why is this Premier's moral compass so fundamentally broken?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, last week I hosted colleagues and staff to a working dinner to discuss government business, decided to do it outdoors rather than indoors, decided to bring in some takeout to discuss government business for three and a half hours, and we did so in full public view. As I said, we have the right to follow the rules, trying to embrace the 10-person outdoor social limit. It's now clear that a couple of us at some points of the night did not maintain the two-metre distance, and for that I truly regret and apologize.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, no one is perfect – I understand that – but the Premier isn't actually sorry he broke the rules. He's not sorry that he mocked this House, and he's not sorry he gaslit the public. He's sorry that Albertans won't stand for it. This isn't sincere. This is self-serving. To the Premier: how can Albertans

trust him when he won't tell the truth until his own grip on power is what's under threat?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the truth is this. On Tuesday we went to phase 1 of the open for summer plan, which permits outdoor gatherings of up to 10 people. The same night we had a meeting planned for government planning purposes. I decided to do it more safely outdoors. We decided to bring in some takeout. We set up four contiguous tables to physically distance. Most of those positions were physically distanced throughout the night. But it's clear that often, as when people get together, people move around, and in this case some people were within the two-metre limit. For that I apologize because we should be held to a higher standard, and the leader is right about that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that last Thursday this Premier repeatedly told the House that he did not break the rules. He had the rules read to him, and he still claimed that he didn't break them. His staff told the media he was not breaking the rules. He told Albertans that they shouldn't trust what they could see in front of their very own eyes. Will the Premier apologize to Albertans and to his colleagues in the House right now for once again saying in this House things that he knew were not true?

Mr. Kenney: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, we made every reasonable effort to maintain social distancing with four contiguous tables, six positions spread out against them. But was there perfect compliance of the two-metre rule for a three and a half hour meeting? No, there wasn't, and for that I apologize.

Ms Notley: Still looking for the apology to this House, Mr. Speaker.

Rural Health Care

Ms Notley: Now, over the weekend we learned that 10 acute-care beds at the St. Paul health care centre will close along with five beds at the Elk Point health centre. These closures are due to a chronic shortage of staff, one caused by the Health minister attacking doctors and threatening nurses with wage rollbacks and pink slips. To the Premier. While you and the Health minister were sipping whisky in the sky palace, rural Albertans were losing health care. What are you going to do to restore services to those rural communities?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, all this stuff about the sky palace. I'd like to ask the leader of the NDP: did she never host colleagues on the terrace of the Premier's office here or at the Federal Building, or is that just hypocrisy?

With respect to health care, Mr. Speaker, this government has added \$90 million for the recruitment and retention of rural physicians. Obviously, the workforce has been affected by the spring spike of COVID-19. Alberta Health Services is working diligently to address any shortfalls in staffing anywhere in the province right now.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier wants to ask me questions, I'm happy to switch places. Maybe we'd finally get somebody working on jobs in this province.

In addition to closing beds, the St. Paul health centre has had to halt surgeries twice in the last two weeks due to a lack of doctors, and at Elk Point the ER won't have any doctors on Tuesdays and Thursdays until further notice. News flash: people don't make appointments for emergencies, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier believe that an emergency room with no doctors is an acceptable

level of service for a rural community, or is this just another way that you're letting the rural community down?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the economy I'm pleased to report that the Conference Board of Canada today projects that, it quotes, Alberta is forecast to pose the strongest rebound amongst all provinces with a gain of 7.2 per cent in real GDP forecast for 2021. With respect to rural physicians we've added an additional \$90 million to have by far the most generous incentives for recruitment and retention of rural physicians. It's true that the locum pool of physicians who are available for temporary assignment was diminished during the spring spike, but AHS is getting back on top of that to ensure full service coverage.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is letting down rural Albertans across Alberta. In Westlock the health centre stopped performing C-sections for a month due to lack of doctors. In Galahad 18 seniors were tossed from their homes because the Premier failed to contain the third wave. We've seen ER closures in both Fairview and Rocky Mountain House. Why doesn't the Premier give a sober second thought on his plan to fire nurses and attack doctors? What needs to happen for him to start caring about rural Albertans' health care?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, 35 seconds is not going to be enough to correct all the misinformation that was just said by the leader, but I'll start with a few of them. We have added 833 new nurses throughout the last year. We have added \$90 million to recruit more physicians. We have had a net increase of physicians throughout the province. Last week the critic for the NDP, the Health critic, misinformed this House by trying . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

Mr. Shandro: . . . to claim that AHS had closed the Galahad care centre. It is totally false. Eighteen residents were temporarily moved as many residents have been moved throughout the pandemic to make sure everyone gets the care they deserve.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:56 and 1:57.

UCP Members' Edmonton Federal Building Gathering (continued)

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, imagine a world where the Justice minister commits a felony. Imagine a world where the Transportation minister speeds down the highway at 200 kilometres an hour. Imagine a world where the minister of environment hunts illegally and yells at fish and game officers trying to enforce the law. To the Premier: tell me how the Minister of Health breaching public health orders in the middle of a pandemic is any different from any of the outrageous examples I just provided.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, is the Member for Edmonton-Glenora going to stand in this place and say that over the past 16 months she has never been within two metres of someone else?

Ms Hoffman: The Health minister did break the public health rules, rules that he put in place. When his colleagues strayed at Christmas, he said, quote: we campaigned on hard work and humility; some people forgot about that last part. The Premier said at the time that he would remove people from their post who breached the public health orders. He made that very clear. Will the Premier remove the Health minister, the environment minister, and the Finance minister

from their positions, or will he keep his word to his drinking buddies over the public?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I said that about people who intentionally engage in or counsel civil disobedience. I have been very clear. Over the past 16 months I've tried to follow the public health guidelines, but there are many cases where I have found myself within two metres of other people who are not from my household, and I suspect that's true of about 4.5 million Albertans.

Ms Hoffman: Premier, the Jameson Four should be no more. It's simple. They should be out of their jobs, by your own words, Premier. Don't explain it to us. Stand in this House and explain to your colleagues – you know, the ones who didn't booze it up on the roof of the sky palace while the four of you were breaking the rules, the rules that apply to everyone else in Alberta – why are you better than everyone else, Premier?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, every day I go to events in the public – vaccine centres, press conferences – and I see people standing within two metres of each other. Nobody is flagrantly seeking to violate the rules. People try to take care as we did by distancing around four contiguous tables. Did we maintain a two-metre distance perfectly over the course of three and a half hours? No. That I regret. But I expect people to understand that these rules are applied in a common-sense way, and 4.5 million Albertans have tried to do so.

2:00

Finance Minister

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance was taking a booze cruise over the COVID rules on the terrace of the sky palace, Morgan Stanley was busy packing up the boxes as they shut down their Calgary office. Jobs and investment leaving downtown Calgary: not a care in the world from this minister, too busy breaking the public health orders and looking down on 200,000 unemployed Albertans from his castle perch. Albertans are outraged with this government, so first things first: will the Minister of Finance apologize to the House, to Albertans – and apparently he also needs to to his caucus team – for his part in the law-breaking party in the sky palace?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, Statistics Canada reported in its labour force survey last Friday that unemployment has reached its lowest level since the beginning of the pandemic, with significant job growth in high-paying sectors like construction and natural resources. Last week we announced with Mphasis the creation of 1,000 new high-paying high-tech jobs in Calgary, part of a huge tech boom that we're seeing in the province, with thousands of new jobs coming in response to our pro-business policies. Today the Conference Board is projecting that Alberta will lead Canada in economic growth.

Ms Phillips: Well, no apology from the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker. He's got the worst performing economic recovery in Canada. He's got plenty of time for high-end dining atop the sky palace, served up on fine linens, but does he have time to do his job? Albertans want to know. After popping a couple of ibuprofen on Wednesday morning, did the Minister of Finance call Morgan Stanley and ask them if chasing away renewables investment with climate denial and uncertainty, chasing away tech jobs with separatism and uncertainty, chasing away companies of all kinds with uncertainty around CPP had anything to do with Morgan Stanley leaving, or did he sleep in that morning?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just said that Alberta has the worst recovery in Canada. Today the Conference Board of Canada, a highly respected nonpartisan think tank, said that Alberta is forecast to post the strongest rebound among the provinces, with a gain of 7.2 per cent in real GDP forecast for 2021. We're halfway through 2021. This is based not just on a forecast but where we are so far. With respect to renewables we have seen more announcements of capital investment in renewable energy than ever in Alberta history under this government, without a dime in taxpayer subsidies.

Ms Phillips: Still no apology from the Minister of Finance. Can't stand up and speak for himself. Billions of dollars in accounting errors and giveaways, billions wasted on betting on Donald Trump, America's biggest bank leaving downtown Calgary: still this Finance minister cannot rise in his place and apologize to Albertans or his own caucus mates because he still thinks that dining atop the sky palace is a luxury Alberta can afford. But economic diversification, good jobs: that's too much to ask. Apologize, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier has been clear, we met last week. We had a business meeting over dinner. We made every effort to follow the public health guidelines. At a couple of occasions during the evening we came within the six-foot mark, so for my part I certainly extend my apology to all Albertans and the members of this House.

But the fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that our economic recovery plan in this province is working. There's much work to do, but the Conference Board of Canada, National Bank, Desjardins, BMO, all believe that Alberta will lead the nation in GDP.

Federal Economic and Energy Policies

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are hard-working people with a strong entrepreneurial spirit. Because of this, Alberta has often been prosperous, generating wealth and opportunity for this province and for the rest of Canada, and Albertans don't mind sharing. During prosperous times equalization has had its place. But after suffering devastating attacks on Alberta's energy industry through the federal antienergy policies such as Bill C-48 and C-69, it's time for a change. This government promised Albertans a referendum on equalization, so can the Justice minister update this House on how we are keeping that promise?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am so proud to announce to this particular Assembly that this province will be putting forward a referendum this particular fall to ask Albertans to determine whether or not to delete section 36 from the Constitution. This was a promise that we made to Albertans. We have heard far and wide everywhere in our province that that particular formula is unfair, and they are looking forward to the people of Alberta being able to speak on this very important issue in the fall.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta makes an approximate net contribution of \$20 billion to fiscal federalism each year and that if other provinces want to keep benefiting from Alberta, then they ought not to block our development in our resource sector, can the minister share with the Chamber how the

government is spreading the message across Canada through this referendum?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. In 2019 Albertans elected the United Conservative government to put an end to the Trudeau and Notley alliance and fight for a fair deal for Alberta. That's exactly what this referendum is all about. Equalization is fundamentally unfair to our province, pulling billions of dollars out of our province even during times of economic hardship and funneling them into provinces with strong and even booming economies. Worse still, politicians in other parts of the country who benefit from Alberta's generosity often turn around and attack our vital economic interests. That will end this particular fall, when Alberta makes a strong statement.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta's prosperity and ability to share that prosperity with the rest of Canada are being significantly hindered by the federal government's antienergy, antidevelopment, and antibusiness policies, especially surrounding Bill C-48 and, again, Bill C-69, can the minister remind this Chamber what this government is doing to combat those federal initiatives and to protect Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont for that very important question. Alberta's government continues to stand up to the federal government's attacks on Alberta's vital economic interests. We continue to challenge Trudeau's no-more-pipelines legislation in our courts. More importantly, this referendum fulfills a major United Conservative Party campaign commitment to deliver on key recommendations of the Fair Deal Panel report. Another promise made; another promise kept.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

COVID-19 Variant Cases

UCP Members' Edmonton Federal Building Gathering

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I represent tens of thousands of essential front-line workers in northeast Calgary. These people went to work every day during the pandemic while the vast majority of Albertans were told to stay home. All they got from the government was disrespect and lagging supports. Now there are concerns about a delta variant of COVID-19 which is extremely contagious, and 85 per cent of the cases are being reported in Calgary. My constituents are concerned, so what is the government doing to get a handle on the delta variant, where it's spreading and how we will stop this?

Mr. Shandro: Incredibly thoughtful and incredibly important questions, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for asking them; it's also important for this government, as it is for AHS and the public health officials. And thank you to the folks at Alberta Precision Labs, who were able to figure out a way of testing for the delta variant without needing a full genome sequencing, so now we are able to test all of our positive samples for that variant, as well as have dedicated teams and contact tracing looking at that, and as well make sure that our vaccine is available in those communities.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that the delta variant cases are on the rise and given that my constituents have told me that the Premier's sky palace dinner party was a slap in the face while they either stayed home or performed essential work and given that even the MLA for Calgary-North East went public and called for the Premier to apologize and given that the Premier only seems to apologize when he gets caught and after days of the public telling him that he did something wrong, why does the Premier choose to engage in risky behaviour during the pandemic, and why does he do things that put the community at large and their lives at risk?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier said – and I'll repeat it as well on my own behalf – there was a social gathering that occurred last week, and I was in attendance as well. There was work before and planning to be able to comply with the restrictions, and as the Premier said: not during the entire time was everybody two metres apart. It's something that I regret as well as the Premier and something I apologize for, on behalf of those who were in attendance, to colleagues and to all Albertans for the perception that it gave.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the UCP Calgary caucus chair reportedly stepped down from his position over the Premier's sky palace pandemic party and given that many UCP MLAs have raised serious concerns about the Premier's risky and illegal behaviour, which the Premier apologized for today, now the question is pretty simple: will the Premier and Minister of Health and the other two ministers commit to paying \$2,000 each in fines since you committed the wrong? You owe Albertans \$8,000 along with that apology.

2:10

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as I said, there was an outdoor social gathering that occurred last week, and I was in attendance as well as the Premier. Not during the entire time was everybody within two metres' distance apart, and it's something that I regret for the perception it gave to Albertans as well as for all Albertans who have been working so hard. Not always are we able to keep two metres' distance apart, but we are as elected officials held to a higher standard. Not always keeping for the entire time two metres apart is something that I apologize to all Albertans for, for that occurring last week.

Premier's Remarks on Canadian Historical Figures

Ms Goehring: I would like to start by offering my condolences to the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for the loss of her family members during this pandemic.

I don't always agree with the minister, but I stand here today in support of her response to the Premier's disgusting comments on so-called cancel culture in light of the horrific and saddening discovery in Kamloops. The minister told the Premier, "Changing the names of schools and educating people about these atrocities is not 'cancel culture'." Has the Premier had time to reflect on his harmful comments, and will he take the advice of his multiculturalism minister and apologize to the indigenous communities and families he hurt?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The matter which the hon. member raised is a serious one, and we all feel terrible about

the injustices, terrible injustices, that happened to our First Nations people. The opinion that I will accept or one of the opinions I will consider is one from Jody Wilson-Raybould, that I heard her give on the radio on the weekend, talking about this issue, when she said: tearing down statues will not make it better. [interjections] They don't want to hear it, but it's an important question. I'm trying to give what I think is a serious answer. Tearing down statues won't help; changing policies, respecting indigenous people . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Given that last week should have been about the tragic discovery of the remains of 215 children at a Kamloops residential school and given that the Premier instead tried to make it about old white men – and his timing was insensitive, hurtful, and completely tone deaf – and given that the minister of multiculturalism said that real cancel culture is ignoring what happened to our First Nations by not acknowledging these atrocities and those responsible, will the Minister of Indigenous Relations stand in the House and advise whether he has spoken to the Premier about how harmful his comments were, and will the minister apologize on the Premier's behalf?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, again, I know there's a variety of opinions, but I heard former minister Wilson-Raybould say that tearing down statues and changing the names will not help indigenous people. One of the examples she gave is fixing the Indian Act, which is a very paternalistic piece of legislation that disrespects indigenous people, disrespects First Nations peoples' ability to make decisions for themselves. I think that's a sensible way to look at this, and I think we all should be serious about . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Given that Albertans shouldn't have to rely on a cabinet revolt for this Premier to do the right thing and given that I know that many are grateful to the multiculturalism minister for standing up against the Premier's hurtful comments and given that it's clear that the Premier needs to be better educated on the history of residential schools, just as all Albertans do, will the minister rise in this House now and address the Premier, explain why his comments were so wrong? You did the right thing, so the floor is yours.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No words can express, you know, the sadness that all of us on this side of the aisle have felt over the discovery of the 215 children who perished at that Kamloops residential school. But this side of the aisle has committed to working with our indigenous brothers and sisters and partners to make sure that we foster true reconciliation, build a better province, and ensure that that never happens again in our province and country.

Job Creation

Mr. Rehn: Mr. Speaker, last week the unemployment numbers for the month of May were released. They show that the general unemployment rate continues to fall month over month in our province and that our economy continues to return to life. Now at 8.7 per cent, the unemployment rate is inching closer to the prepandemic level of around 7 per cent. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation elaborate on his plan to reduce unemployment further towards pre-COVID levels and, hopefully, below those levels?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. On Friday Statistics Canada reported that Alberta's unemployment rate dropped to the lowest rate since the start of the pandemic. That's good news. We've recovered 86 per cent of the jobs lost at the start of the pandemic last year. There's more work to do, but we're pleased with the progress. Another good indicator in last month's jobs report was that we regained 7,700 jobs in the natural resources sector.

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

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some of the largest employment sectors in Lesser Slave Lake are the construction industry, the mining industry, the retail sector, and the accommodation and food services industry and given that these sectors in total employ 32.6 per cent of the jobs in Lesser Slave Lake and given that those four sectors all have seen double-digit decreases in unemployment since the height of the pandemic, would the minister provide this Legislature with details of his government's plan to grow jobs in high-performing sectors like these in Lesser Slave Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. I know first-hand that in the member's constituency the resource sector plays an incredibly important role. That's why again I want to point out that the jobs report showed that in the natural resource and construction industries there were almost 14,000 jobs added. That's good news. And thanks to all Albertans, we'll soon see accommodation and food services as well as retail add jobs in the coming month as we implement our ambitious and science-based open for summer plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our economy does best with broad participation and given that our economy will be well served through diversification and given that careers in industries like the skilled trades are both rewarding and well compensated but that many youth are not naturally inclined to see themselves enter a trade, can the minister share with us the government's prior and future efforts to encourage uptake of the trades?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, again thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The Minister of Labour and Immigration has introduced the jobs now program, which is the largest and most ambitious job retraining program in Alberta's history. This will allow many trades-based employers to hire more employees and give them well-paying and needed employment. The Minister of Advanced Education has also recently taken steps to recognize the very real and very strong contribution that trades make to our province, including the Skills for Jobs Task Force, our trades caucus, and the Alberta 2030 plan.

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

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta School Boards Association is debating a motion of nonconfidence

in the current Minister of Education's draft curriculum today. Over 90 per cent of school boards have already rejected the pilot; so have teachers, parents, indigenous and francophone leaders. Clearly, Albertans want the minister to ditch her draft. Who did the Minister of Education call to beg them for their support in this debate, and what did she offer them?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, the Minister of Education has released a draft curriculum, and we as a government are happy to receive feedback on this draft curriculum. It has been a very transparent process, and I know that the Minister of Education is looking forward to receiving feedback and specifically looking forward to receiving feedback not only from schools that are piloting the curriculum but from education partners as well.

Ms Hoffman: Well, given that 56 out of 61 school boards have refused to pilot the curriculum, with the other five only agreeing to pilot small portions of it, and given that she has already refused to listen to the families of those who have been included in the curriculum, including the granddaughter of Agnes Leffler Perry Chaney, who asked this minister to remove mentions of her grandmother from the curriculum – Minister, she does not consent to her grandmother being included – the opposition to this curriculum is massive, and it's growing. Is the Education minister shocked to find that everyone opposes this curriculum? Will she finally start listening? When will she ditch the draft? Enough is enough.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely interested in the feedback of all Albertans on this draft curriculum. A renewal of the curriculum is long overdue. It is important for students to learn not only basics in literacy, numeracy, financial literacy, and history. We are welcoming the feedback of all Albertans, and that does include education/school partners. We know that many school divisions are working on providing feedback in the fall as well, and we will take all of that feedback into the final version.

2:20

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Alberta School Boards Association will be voting on this terrible curriculum draft today and given that school boards, principals, teachers, parents, and even the government's original validators of the curriculum have rejected it – they've rejected what this minister has put forward – she shows no sign that she's listening, though. They have made it very clear that they do not support this draft curriculum. If ASBA votes today to reject this failed curriculum, will the minister finally do the right thing and pull the pilot? We can't wait another year, Minister. Show some leadership. Stop it today.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I know that this has been a difficult year, and I do want to thank administrators and teachers for all the work that they've done to keep students and teachers safe during the pandemic and staff as well. I know that for some school divisions, you know, they've expressed that they may not be moving forward on piloting at this time. Certainly, I know I've spoken with some school divisions who had said that just with COVID, that's not something that they want to do right now, but they are absolutely looking forward to bringing their school

division's feedback forward. There are school divisions piloting this, and the Minister of Education is listening.

Wildland Firefighter Pay Schedule

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely grateful for the work of wildland firefighters. They're an important part of the public sector, and they deserve to have adequate public funding to support their work and keep the province safe. There should never be a question of if they will get paid on time. However, there have been numerous reports of multiple wildland firefighters not receiving any cheques this season. Firefighters have been working for a month and a half and are not getting paid. Will the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry explain why he is allowing this unacceptable and disrespectful failure to continue?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With the 1GX program that we are implementing right now across the government – Agriculture and Forestry was actually a pilot in that process – especially with seasonal pay, it has been having some glitches in the system. We are making sure that our wildland firefighters will get paid. It is unfortunate that the union does seem to do a lot of misrepresentation. They were out in the media the other day saying that retention is somehow at its lowest level. Actually, we're about 47 per cent better than the average for retaining wildland firefighters back into our ranks this year.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the UCP gutted the rappel program in 2019, contrary to expert advice, and given that the UCP drastically cut the wildfire budget by \$30 million this year and given that allowing firefighters to continue not to be paid is just another proof point of the UCP's mishandling of this file, will the minister finally start listening to people who actually understand wildfire protection and listen to the hundreds of workers, many seasonal hires, not being paid? Why does the UCP continue to ignore wildland firefighters? The work they do literally saves lives.

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The brave men and women at Alberta Wildfire: we actually have over 400 of them that we've hired this year alone. They're out there battling fires, similar to what we did last year. We actually had 200 extra last year. The member opposite talked about the rappel program. We cancelled that two years ago. Last year we had one of the best fire seasons ever in the province, and this year has been off to a great start. Again, hats off to Alberta Wildfire men and women for doing such a great job keeping Alberta communities safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is not the first time that the UCP has failed to pay workers on time – the 1GX program had drastic failures in January, when some workers reported missing up to 40 per cent of their pay – and given that it's been five months since then and given that this program has not been fixed and now firefighters are being forced to borrow money to pay their bills and given that they're being forced to do that while performing dangerous work that is critical to keeping Albertans safe, will the minister explain why paying some of Alberta's bravest heroes isn't a priority for him? When will this mess get fixed, Minister? Do something.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are doing something, but something I haven't done is visit the members opposite's Back to the NDP Future website. It's something that I'm sure is filled with more taxes and more regulations on Albertans. But when it comes to this file, we are working on it. We are making sure that our brave men and women at Alberta Wildfire are getting paid, will get paid. As I mentioned in my first response, with seasonal hires there has been a glitch in the 1GX system, but we are making sure that that's getting resolved, and our brave men and women will be paid. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has the call.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Residential School Deaths

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Thursday the federal government released the national action plan for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, with the purpose to bring the country around a common goal. Indigenous women and girls and 2S-plus people were instrumental in bringing their stories forward, sought change, which led to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. To the minister: what is the government doing to ensure that we can appropriately follow up on these action items and continue on our path towards reconciliation?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. colleague for the question. In March 2020 Alberta established the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, made up of four indigenous women and three Members of the Legislative Assembly. The indigenous members have years of experience working with and advocating for indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ-plus people vulnerable to violence in Alberta. The joint working group will recommend and advise our government on actions that Alberta should take to address this horrible violence. Expected in December 2021, their report will ensure the voices and experiences of indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ-plus people are at the heart of Alberta's efforts to make this province a safer place for those . . .

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government established the Alberta joint working group, the AJWG, to engage respectfully on matters related to intergenerational trauma, decolonization, and economic and social marginalization, just to name a few items, and further given that the government is committing to ending violence against indigenous peoples – indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ2S-plus people deserve to live free and feel protected in our communities – again to the minister: what is the government doing to ensure that we prevent any future violence against indigenous women and girls?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know my colleague the Minister of Indigenous Relations and our government take violence against indigenous women, girls, and the LBGTQ2S-plus community very seriously. Alberta immediately acted in response

to the national inquiry's report. Actions included the following: we declared October 4, 2019 and 2020, as Sisters in Spirit Day to honour the memory and raise awareness of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, their families, and loved ones; we established the Human Trafficking Task Force to recommend ways to implement Alberta's action plan against human trafficking; we also enacted legislation to help protect individuals from domestic violence, including Clare's law and human trafficking. These are just some of the examples of real actions we've taken.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a week and a half ago the bodies of 215 innocent children were found at a residential school in Kamloops, this discovery confirming what indigenous people and leaders have been saying all along and which contributes immensely to the legacy of intergenerational trauma experienced by indigenous people across the country, and further given that Alberta had a substantial number of residential schools, again to the minister: what is the government doing to ensure that we can find any remains of any other innocent children at Alberta residential schools?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the recent discovery of graves of 215 children at the Kamloops residential school is absolutely heartbreaking. I can't imagine the pain and suffering that these families went through, particularly as a father of three children myself. This discovery has also prompted concerns about unmarked burial sites and lack of information here in Alberta. I'm very pleased that my colleague the Minister of Indigenous Relations has committed to fund community-led research and engagement efforts to identify indigenous communities that are affiliated with each residential school in Alberta and work with the communities on how to proceed. We are also committed to ensuring the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Well, it's been quite a year, Mr. Speaker, for Red Deer and Grande Prairie students under this UCP government. Not only did the UCP break its promise to these schools to become full universities, but then they decimated postsecondary budgets generally, causing widespread layoffs, program cuts, tuition hikes, and more. Red Deer and Grande Prairie have been given some degree status at the same time that they have had their budgets cut to unprecedented levels. Why does this minister still keep picking on these two schools, and why doesn't he start to help them while cutting their budget at the same time?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of postsecondary.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm not too sure about that. It's been a great year for students and staff at Grande Prairie Regional College and Red Deer College. Under our government Red Deer College has its first degrees, and they have more applications in the pipeline to offer degrees that are critical to the community. As well, we confirmed that we'll be moving ahead in transitioning Red Deer College to a polytechnic – that will enable them to offer the breadth of programming that is needed in the community – and the same goes for Grande Prairie. That'll ensure those institutions are set up for success.

2:30

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Red Deer and Grande Prairie have some degree-granting at the same time that they have had unprecedented cuts to their budgets – the two things simply

don't add up – and given as well that in April the federal government released its budget, announcing that \$121 million will be allocated to postsecondary francophone institutions in Canada but here in Alberta schools like Campus Saint-Jean cannot receive some of this money without a promise of equal funds matched from this provincial government, to the minister: will you promise schools like Campus Saint-Jean that you will invest in postsecondary so that they can deal with critical issues?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're investing just under \$2 billion annually to our postsecondary institutions. That's to our 26 institutions. Just to give you some comparison, in 2017-18, in numbers from Stats Canada, the University of Alberta received about \$18,000 in provincial operating funding per student, and the national average across the U15 is about \$12,000. We continue to provide our institutions with adequate funding, as I mentioned, just under \$2 billion per year, and we'll continue to do so.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that without the matching money from the province of Alberta, from this government, the francophone communities in this province will lose the federal funding that the federal government put forward and given as well that if you are putting in new programs and if you don't finance them and if you're in fact cutting money back from those budgets, then those promises for degrees are not worth the paper that they're printed on, and given as well that because of budget cuts it has a very high direct impact on quality education and students are leaving the province, Mr. Minister: do better.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments and questions from the member opposite. You know, the member opposite, I guess, from his questions, just doesn't believe in ingenuity within our system. We have been offering more programs. SAIT just recently announced the creation of the digital school of advanced technology after an incredible contribution. Other schools are continuing to offer new degree programs and widening the breadth of their programs. The member opposite seems to believe that the only way in which to do so is to continue to provide more government funding. There are other ways.

Kananaskis Country Park Fees

Mr. Nielsen: Once again this government shows that when it comes to red tape, it's all about making life worse for Albertans but easier for their friends. Last week this government's park fee went into effect. This government rushed through this House a bill to add fees to Alberta families looking to visit their very own backyard, like they've done for half a century. This will no doubt stop families from going to K Country at all. Can the minister of red tape please state why he's adding red tape and blocking access by so many Albertans to this beautiful provincial park?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is this. Alberta is an incredibly beautiful province. We have incredibly attractive and enjoyable green spaces for Albertans to visit, but in keeping up those parks, it takes resources. That's the general plan, to ensure that we have adequate resources in this province so that we can maintain parks and, in fact, improve parks and improve Albertans' experiences in those parks.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, given that the associate minister cheered on the attempts of the environment minister to sell parks and given that the associate minister was also lobbied on the removal of the Loughheed coal policy – and then it was removed – and given that now the associate minister is supporting a tax that will make it harder for families to visit Kananaskis Country, something that has been free since the Loughheed government, will the associate minister just admit his support for this fee is part of his own personal war on Alberta parks as he adds red tape on families but removes it for coal companies? Mr. Speaker, what a joke.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find the comments from the member opposite somewhat hypocritical given the fact that the government that that member was a part of looked to actually prohibit Albertans' access into green space on the eastern slopes. This Kananaskis fee is about sustainability. It's about ensuring in the long term that Albertans have access to beautiful parks to enjoy.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that where this associate minister chooses to cut and add red tape is highly questionable and given that we, the Alberta NDP, did try to add some restrictions, or, of course, what the minister would prefer to call red tape, by requiring that all the money taken in this ridiculous K Country fee be put back directly into the park and given that the amendment for that was voted down, will the minister admit that in his blind bid to remove red tape, it's ultimately Alberta families and the parks that they love that will get screwed?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say this, that any park fees collected will be reinvested in Alberta parks. Again, this will ensure the sustainability of the Alberta parks system. But one thing I find amusing is the members opposite's aversion to red tape reduction. They were a government that added billions and billions of dollars in additional regulatory burden. They made our industries uncompetitive. We're going to turn that around.

Renewable Energy Development

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this weekend the Leader of the Opposition made some big promises to Albertans to make our electricity grid net zero by 2035. It's my understanding that Alberta already is the Canadian leader in attracting new investment in renewable generation without government subsidies. Also, it's my understanding that costly government interventions as suggested by the NDP would ensure hefty utility bill increases for Albertans. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: can you please explain to this House why this plan is so ridiculous and unnecessary?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, if the NDP taught us anything, it's that socialist meddling in the marketplace only creates higher electricity prices for Albertans. Now, I find it particularly amusing that the members opposite just recently announced that they want to make Alberta into a top powerhouse for renewable energy. Well, in the entire brain trust of the NDP did nobody think to tell the leader opposite that Alberta already is the top destination for renewable energy in Canada and that we did it without government subsidies?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that private industry is already moving rapidly towards a greener and more sustainable economy and given that fostering investor confidence in the Alberta energy industry is of vital importance to our economy and given that the concerns I hear about almost daily regarding our grid are around affordability and reliability, can the minister please explain why this plan delivers unrealistic expectations to Albertans and will hurt the progress already being made?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, private market investment is already driving a greener grid in Alberta. Why on earth would we change the fundamental dynamic that has already made us so successful? Need I remind you that in the NDP's short and disastrous time in government they incurred a billion dollars in losses in the Balancing Pool, and that's a billion dollars in losses that Albertans are still paying off to this day. Now they want to double down and wreak havoc on the electricity grid to get to net zero by 2035. At what cost?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we are seeing massive private investment interest in power generation with new technologies and given that most renewable electricity sources are intermittent and not able to keep our grid running at all times, can the minister please explain the vital role that natural gas thermal generation has in achieving emissions reductions while ensuring electricity remains affordable in Alberta?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we embrace renewable energy, but when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining, it will be natural gas that ensures Alberta has safe, reliable, uninterrupted electricity. Now, I have to say that the socialists are not going to be happy until we have skyrocketing electricity prices and rolling blackouts, just like other jurisdictions that have also pursued a utopian ideology over pragmatic business decisions. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Provincial Reopening Plan

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, just a few weeks ago our government announced Alberta's open for summer plan, which will see the lifting of all restrictions by the beginning of July. Last week we entered stage 1, which saw personal wellness services and patio dining reopen as well as restrictions eased for outdoor gatherings. Now Alberta is scheduled to move on to stage 2 of the open for summer plan on Thursday, June 10. To the Minister of Health: can you provide details as to what stage 2 means for Albertans?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stage 2 is focused on providing businesses with the opportunity to reopen or to expand what they are already able to offer. Youth and adult sports will resume with no restrictions while youth activities such as day camps may have some restrictions. The work-from-home order will be lifted, and postsecondary institutions will be able to resume in-person learning. This Thursday will be an exciting day for all Albertans. It's another step forward in putting the pandemic behind us and getting Alberta back to normal.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Albertans have been eager to go back to gyms and other fitness activities for some time and given that youth and outdoor sports will be able to resume with no restrictions, indoors or outdoors, and given that under stage 2 gyms and fitness studios will be open for solo and drop-in activities and indoor fitness classes with three-metre distancing, to the same minister: will there be any specific restrictions for gyms and fitness studios to follow during stage 2?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In stage 2 there will be specific restrictions for gyms and fitness studios to follow. They will look very similar to what was currently in place as of stage 1 for outdoor and group fitness classes. Stage 2 will see broader opportunities for the sector, both indoor and outdoor fitness, with some continued restrictions until we hit stage 3. Gyms and other fitness facilities and studios may reopen for individual workouts, group fitness classes, or one-on-one personal training. There is no capacity limit. However, folks must be able to maintain three metres from each other at all times, and this includes during indoor group fitness classes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that stage 3 will begin two weeks after 70 per cent of eligible Albertans are vaccinated and given that Alberta is on track to enter stage 3 at the end of June or early July and given that stage 3 will see all restrictions lifted, to the minister: will the mask mandate be lifted in stage 3?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the province-wide legal mask mandate and physical distancing requirements will be lifted as part of stage 3. Masks and spacing will still be encouraged. There'll be recommendations, but they will not be required. Until all eligible Albertans have had a chance to get a second dose, masking may continue to be required in some targeted situations such as continuing care homes or other health care facilities to protect vulnerable Albertans.

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

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m.

Members' Statements

(continued)

NDP 2021 Convention

Mr. Dang: This weekend Albertans got to see a party with a vision, a passion, and with a focus on building an Alberta for all. Over 1,100 dedicated Albertans gathered to build a movement that will take Alberta into the future. While the Premier lounged on the sky palace fighting with his caucus and ignoring Albertans looking for an apology, our party was hard at work. Our members debated and passed policies that provide paid sick leave for all workers, replace this government's failed curriculum, shut down the embarrassing

international failure that is the energy war room, take steps to address systemic racism, and so much more. While the UCP continues to brag about their failed jobs strategy, that caused 50,000 job losses even before the pandemic and has done nothing for the 200,000 Albertans still looking for work, our leader proposed a plan that would create 60,000 jobs, diversify our economy, and establish Alberta as a leader in renewable energy.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Our party heard from inspirational speakers, including an outstanding group of rural Albertans whose communities have been ignored by this UCP government. Quote: it's time to start caring about the people that you serve. End quote. This is one message that a rural councillor had for the Premier, and I could not agree more with that, Madam Speaker.

Albertans watched the Premier fail the simplest test of leadership last week as he threw a wine and whisky sky palace patio party almost minutes after he tweeted to Albertans to follow the rules. Alberta is looking for leadership, and after last week they know they won't get it from the UCP. Instead, they saw that our leader is the future of this province. They saw a compassionate, thoughtful, inspirational leader who walks the walk, talks the talk, and never tells Albertans to do anything that she herself would not do and who has a wicked sense of humour. This weekend Albertans got to see two visions of Alberta, one that has its leaders on a patio with a forty of Scotch looking down on Albertans following the rules and one with a vision, drive, and a plan to take Alberta forward.

My most sincere thanks to those who participated and shared their weekend with us to build an Alberta for all.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Peigan.

Fish Creek Provincial Park

Ms Fir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Established in 1975, Fish Creek provincial park is the second-largest urban-protected area in Canada, nearing 20 kilometres west to east at the south end of Calgary. It is estimated that there are over 1 million visitors to Fish Creek provincial park every year.

Fish Creek is very important to many of my constituents in Calgary-Peigan who live near or back onto the park. One of the most beloved features of the park is its extensive system of trails, which includes more than 100 kilometres of paved, gravel, and single-track paths. Some trails are too close to sensitive habitats and require frequent maintenance to ensure safety and protect the land. When I moved to Calgary in 1985 as a young girl, our first home backed onto Fish Creek provincial park, and I've always felt that it was such a special place within a big urban city.

Alberta's government is committed to making improvements so that Calgarians and Albertans can continue to enjoy the beauty of Fish Creek provincial park for generations to come. Environment and Parks is currently seeking input from users and stakeholders for the Fish Creek park trails master plan. The plan will support sustainable, accessible, safe, and unique trails for all visitors to enjoy. Improvements to the trail system will help protect the park's nature, cultural resources, and rich history for generations to come. This work will build on the \$6.1 million we're investing in improvements for Fish Creek provincial park from 2019 to 2022. Some of the improvements include upgrades to restrooms and group shelters, trail planning, and parking lot reclamation. We are committed to ensuring Alberta's special places are protected and outdoor recreation is funded and managed sustainably for future generations, and this includes Fish Creek park.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Up until June 14, 2021, Albertans have the chance to read the draft trails master plan and take the survey at Alberta.ca/FishCreekTrailsPlan. Your feedback will help finalize the plan and guide future improvements throughout the park. Let's continue to work together to help keep Fish Creek provincial park on the right path.

Job Creation and Renewable Energy Development

Ms Ganley: In the last election the UCP promised jobs, economic growth, and pipelines. Their entire plan centred around handing over billions to already profitable corporations. The UCP asked them for nothing in return, and not surprisingly, Albertans got nothing in return. Our economy stalled, investment plummeted, and 50,000 jobs were lost even before the pandemic. When the pandemic hit, they doubled down, accelerating the handout. Today there are over 200,000 Albertans looking for work. Over the last four months 14,000 jobs have been lost, and 25,000 Albertans have given up looking entirely.

While the UCP recycles a failed economic playbook from decades past, the world moves on. While the UCP sticks their head in the sand, the biggest players in our oil sector, including Suncor, Shell, Enbridge, Cenovus, CNRL, and more, are moving ahead with plans to achieve net zero by 2050, and we need a plan for Alberta's future.

Thankfully, the NDP has a plan. We will achieve net zero by 2050 with a first step of a net zero electricity grid by 2035. This is not an either/or scenario. This is a plan that will support our oil and gas sector while building a truly diversified economy, creating 60,000 jobs, and making Alberta a renewable energy powerhouse. It's a plan that will attract billions in new investment in Alberta's renewable energy market along with dramatic reductions in emissions. By doing so, we will be a global leader in all forms of energy while protecting the economic security of working people. Alberta, we have a real plan for jobs that prepares us for the future. We can have a stronger economy without a race to the bottom. We can do it together.

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

Police

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few years and more recently leftist activists have waged a campaign against the police in every way, shape, and form. Liberals have called to defund the police, completely ignoring the vital work they do in impoverished communities. Wealthy elites and celebrities have spoken out against our men and women in uniform, all the while surrounding themselves with their own private and armed security.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, these are the kind of people who have never experienced the reality of living in an area with high crime rates, yet these same people are throwing themselves at the opportunity to tarnish a symbol that many, including myself, wear proudly and hold very dearly. I'm speaking about the thin blue line, often in the form of a pin or a flag that recognizes the lives of officers lost while on duty. The thin blue line is something that symbolizes true heroism and sacrifice, and frankly I'm astounded that some people have started calling it a symbol of racism. This is unacceptable even under the ever-shifting standards of the left. Every day I wear my pin with pride. The design is something I proposed myself while I worked as an officer in the Calgary Police Service, and now I'm

disappointed to see academics and other kinds of activists try to diminish and demonize the hard work that the police often do.

I'd like to close by asking these activists one thing: the next time you or a loved one is in danger, God forbid, or you experience a break-in or witness a car accident, will you call the police? I know you will, and I know that they will come to your aid without any hesitation because that is what they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has a statement to make.

Premier's and Opposition Leader's Leadership

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are turning their backs on this UCP government. The government and their Premier have for way too long taken Albertans for granted. They chose to spend tens of thousands of dollars flying the Premier's friends to the Stampede. The Premier put his earplugs in rather than listening to the concerns of Albertans in the Legislature. He refused to act to support small businesses and pounced on a loophole to ensure that the UCP got subsidized by taxpayers. He told Albertans to stay home but then gave permission for ministers, MLAs, and staff to enjoy international vacations. Despite the rules that every other Albertan is expected to follow, he threw a patio party on the sky palace for his top aides and ministers. In his defence he said that the whisky he drank in the sky palace wasn't that expensive.

Albertans see the government and this UCP for what they are: entitled, arrogant, and in it for themselves, eager to help their friends and insiders but reluctant to do anything beyond the bare minimum to support Albertans even while a global pandemic rages.

Albertans know that they have a choice coming up, and more and more they are speaking out loud. There was a clear contrast this weekend. While the Premier found himself under siege from his own cabinet ministers and MLAs, our leader was endorsed by 98 per cent of our party. While the Premier and his government completely failed at job creation – today we have more than 200,000 Albertans out of work – our leader has advocated a positive vision for the future, including a plan to create 60,000 jobs in the renewable energy sector.

While the UCP fights doctors and teachers and its own members are fighting against child care, sick pay, and even stronger health care systems, we are proud – I'm proud to be a member of a party, a caucus that has a leader that walks the walk and talks the talk and wants to make Alberta better for everyone. The 2023 campaign is just around the corner, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to work with people right across this province to . . .

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

Child and Youth Well-being Review

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta children and youth have displayed a remarkable resilience as we have fought to protect lives and livelihoods. In Calgary-Klein I have seen many examples of kids rising up to the challenge of this pandemic. Allysha and Ruby volunteered to give out bikes to other kids. Sawyer, Finn, and Oliver distributed encouraging notes to their neighbours. My own kids purchased food hampers for people in need.

However, a year of sacrifice and isolation has taken a toll. Emerging data indicates a decline in the mental, physical, and social health of our children during the pandemic. Research from Toronto's Sick Kids hospital shows that a majority of children and youth experienced harm to their mental health. A B.C. report found

that 76 per cent of students reported impaired learning due to school closures. Many of my constituents have expressed concern about the impacts of the pandemic and related public health measures that they have witnessed in their own children, that I've observed in my own children.

On May 27 the Minister of Children's Services and the Member for Calgary-South East announced a review of the effect of the pandemic on our children and youth. This review features an expert panel which will lead public and targeted engagement to understand psychological, social, educational, and physical outcomes of the pandemic on our young people. They will be conducting town halls, meetings, and round-tables to investigate these impacts. I'm excited to be able to provide feedback, and I encourage all Albertans to do the same. They can also provide their feedback by completing the survey at your.alberta.ca. By the fall the panel will review the findings and provide recommendations to Alberta's government on how to support young people.

To the parents who have expressed their concern: we have heard you, and this review is the first step in addressing the impacts of this pandemic on our children. Our children are our future. We owe it to them to do what we can to provide and support them as they go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Member Irwin: Like many of us, I can't stop thinking about the mass grave of 215 children found in Kamloops and about the generations of indigenous kids erased by residential schools. Across the country we gathered to mourn, to reflect, and to remember, including at the memorial that grew on the steps outside this building.

But we need to do more than remember, more than say: we'll do better. We need action, and we need real change. This isn't a dark moment in Canadian history; it's our ongoing history, our legacy, and our present, too. Residential schools, the '60s scoop, indigenous children in care: this is living history. This is our truth, and when it comes to accessing health care, housing, education, economic opportunities, justice, and so much more, widespread structural racism continues today.

The families of missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit folks are still waiting for justice. Last week, two years after the national inquiry released its landmark final report with 231 calls for justice, the federal government finally presented their response, with promises of transformative change to end violence against indigenous women and girls and a commitment to work closely with communities in doing so. But much of our justice system falls under provincial jurisdiction; the same is true for most social services. This means that real change cannot occur without meaningful action from this provincial government. We've urged them to act on those calls for justice, but we've yet to see any tangible action.

Instead, last week we heard this Premier go on a rant about so-called cancel culture and praise the legacy of John A. Macdonald. This isn't leadership. This is far from what's needed in this moment. I'm calling on this Premier to change course, to change his thinking, to listen, to recognize the truth, and for his government to act and, when acting, to meaningfully do so and include indigenous voices at the table. As a settler in this Chamber it's my job to continue to educate myself, to be an ally, to push for better, and to ensure action, which is why I and my colleagues won't stop fighting until this government acts.

To the families of those lost to the genocide of residential schools and the many missing . . .

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

ALS Awareness Month

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The month of June is ALS Awareness Month, and I would like to recognize all Albertans who've been affected by this terrible disease. Approximately 2,500 to 3,000 Canadians live with ALS. The costly equipment and care that are necessary for those affected are a huge physical, emotional, and financial drain on the families and individuals who battle this illness. But there is a lot of good being done. Millions of dollars are being raised each year for research through multiple charities across the country, and there have been big strides in the development of new treatments and therapeutic drugs as a result.

An inspiring story from my own riding of Drumheller-Stettler comes from Altario school. Altario lost a member of its community, Kari Evans, the school librarian and educational assistant, after a brave fight with ALS late last year. Kari was inspirational, kind, and courageous. She was a runner, and it was the weakness in her legs that was the first indication that she would be the third generation in her family to be diagnosed with ALS. In November 2019 Altario school, a small K to 12 school with 60 students, rallied its community to raise awareness and funds for ALS. Led by three high school students, in just four weeks the Altario community raised \$30,000 for ALS research and the ALS Society of Alberta.

This month the Altario school and surrounding communities are once again actively raising tens of thousands of dollars for the ALS cause. In her memory the school has planned a pair of walks for June 11 and 12. The walk on the 11th will give the students a chance to support the cause while the walk on the 12th will give the wider community a chance to get involved. I urge Albertans across the province to donate if they can to honour the memories of Kari Evans and other victims of ALS and to work towards a future free of this terrible disease.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As 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 218, Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries) Amendment Act, 2021, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. This bill was referred to the committee on May 27, 2021. The report recommends that Bill 218 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 218.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 218, Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries) Amendment Act, 2021, is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak to concurrence? A member has risen. A motion for concurrence will take place on the next available Monday.

3:00

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of my intention to rise again under Standing Order 15 over a member's

breach of privilege. I've provided the Speaker's office with notice of my intention to do so at the required time.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-West, you have a tabling?

Mr. Ellis: No tabling.

The Speaker: Another report?

Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, was on the Fair Deal Panel, and I'd like to table my supplemental report to it. It was clear that Albertans are expecting more than just a favourable result on ending equalization, and this outlines it.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mrs. Sawhney, Minister of Community and Social Services, responses to questions raised by Ms Renaud, hon. Member for St. Albert, on March 16, 2021, Ministry of Community and Social Services 2021-22 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 1:56 the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall and at 1:57 the Member for Edmonton-South rose on a point of order. I'm not sure if we'll be arguing them as two points of order or one.

Mr. Sabir: I can do it in one.

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

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's pursuant to 23(h), (i), and (j). Around 1:56 the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and Leader of the Official Opposition was asking the Health minister a question. In response, the Minister of Health said that 35 seconds are not enough to correct all the misinformation said by the member. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but clearly it was directed at the member, and it was in reference to the question that the member asked. Clearly, the Minister of Health was offside the standing orders and was imputing that there was misinformation shared by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Around 1:57 again the Minister of Health rose to answer a question, and he said something to the effect that the opposition critic for Health misled the House. That's a clear violation of the standing orders of this House. I urge you to find this a point of order and ask the member to retract, apologize, and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also do not have the Blues, but just from the description that the hon. member made with the point of order, it seems pretty obvious to me that this is a matter of debate. People in this House often say things and I'm sure all hon. members say things that they believe to be true, but sometimes other hon. members don't agree, which is one of the reasons we come here, to debate issues and present different sides of the issues and sometimes make decisions on those issues. In this particular

example, it seems to me, just from the hon. member's description while he was trying to make his point of order, he kind of made it clear that this is a matter of debate, and I would recommend that you see it as such.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. At 1:56 the hon. Minister of Health said the following:

Mr. Speaker, 35 seconds is not going to be enough to correct all the misinformation that was just said by the leader, but I'll start with a few of them.

I'll skip some in the name of time. He then went on to say:

We have had a net increase of physicians throughout the province. Last week the critic for the NDP, the Health critic, misinformed this House by trying . . .

And then he proceeded.

While I do appreciate the hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader's submission that he was specifically speaking to individuals inside this Chamber, I have at some length spoken specifically about members saying things like "The opposition is lying" or that a member is lying or also deliberately misleading. The problem here this afternoon for the hon. Opposition House Leader is that at 1:51 the Leader of the Opposition said the following. "This is self-serving. To the Premier: how can Albertans trust him when he won't tell the truth until his own grip on power is what's under threat?" Essentially, these two statements are identical, specifically referring to an individual inside the Chamber. In this case, the Leader of the Opposition said that the Premier wasn't telling the truth. In the case of the Minister of Health, he said that the critic misinformed the House, perhaps even less strong, and the Minister of Health said: "correct all the misinformation."

What I would say – and I've provided a caution; this is now the third time – is specifically that when we refer to individuals taking strong positions on policy and we disagree with that and make an accusation that they are misleading or, in the case of the Leader of the Opposition, that a member isn't telling the truth, this often has the end result of creating disorder, and I would encourage all members to refrain from doing so.

But this is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

During Notices of Motions the hon. the Member for Central Peace-Notley rose to give notice of a point of privilege, which the Assembly will hear now.

Privilege

Misleading the House

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a matter of breach of privilege, Standing Order 15, and in particular the question of privilege relates to statements made by the Premier and the Minister of Health that were deliberately misleading statements to the Assembly during question period on Thursday, June 3, 2021. These statements related to the gathering of members of the Executive Council and the Premier's and the minister's statements regarding their compliance with the current public health orders during that gathering.

Now, Standing Order 15(2) reads:

A Member wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least 2 hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting and, before the Orders of the Day are called, shall call attention to the alleged breach of privilege and give a brief statement of the nature of the matter addressed in the complaint.

Now, I've done so and, although not required, gave notice to the Premier, the Health minister, and the House leaders.

We must cover at this time what happened for the House to be misled by the remarks of the Premier and the minister. In this section we will prove, in fact, that the statements were misleading. We will also prove why this is the first opportunity to review this matter and also why the ministers knew that their remarks were untrue at the time they were given. We will go over this in great detail and prove that members intended to mislead the House.

Now, I'll do my best to be brief, but there are a lot of comments here to cover. We must discuss what happened for the House to be misled by the remarks of the Premier and the minister. I will cover this in two parts: first, the remarks that followed the questions and then the direct rules from the chief medical officer's record of decision, 2021 COVID-19 response regarding stage 1, open for summer plan, Order 30-2021. The document itself states that these rules are effective June 1, 2021. Now, as far as the House knows, this patio event is covered by these health orders.

The remarks in question first appear in *Hansard* on June 3 on pages 5211 to 5215. The remarks in question are from question period on Thursday. Now, in response to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora's question, the Premier's response was:

Tuesday we moved forward with stage 1 of Alberta's open-for-summer plan, which included expanding outdoor gatherings to a maximum of 10 people. We had a business dinner, which we moved outside, with six people, that was fully rule compliant.

Again in response to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora's question, the Premier said: "followed all of the rules carefully." Of course, we know that isn't accurate. But, also, in response to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, the Premier said:

With respect to the rules, we made every reasonable effort to be physically distanced, outdoors, rather than doing an indoor meeting, fully compliant with the rules.

3:10

Also, in response to the Member for Calgary-McCall, the Premier said:

Because they weren't breached, Mr. Speaker. I will refer the hon. member to the Alberta Health Services website with respect to the open for summer plan. It says the following, and I quote: effective June 1, unless stated otherwise, outdoor social gatherings up to 10 people are permitted. We had six people. That's four fewer than 10 people. The same rules apply to everyone, and even members of the Legislature, when they are meeting for business, are allowed to follow the rules.

Again, in response to the Member for Calgary-McCall, the Premier said:

This was an outdoor social gathering, fully compliant with the rules, physically distanced.

Next I will cover the remarks from the Minister of Health that we believe constitute a breach. In response to the Member for Edmonton-South, the Minister of Health claimed: "no rules broken." This is blatantly false according to the health orders that I will get to shortly. Mr. Speaker, in response to my own question on Thursday, the Health minister falsely claimed:

The public health measures were not undermined, and they were, in fact, in consideration when the event was planned.

In response to my first supplemental, the Minister of Health said:

These are public health measures that were included and considered in the planning of the event. We are now in stage 1, that allows outdoor social gathering, up to 10 people.

Now we'll go on to the rules. What I'm about to read are the rules directly taken from chief medical officer's record of decision, 2021 COVID-19 response regarding stage 1, open for summer plan, Order 30-2021. The document itself states that these rules are effective June 1, 2021, and as far as the House knows, this patio

event is covered under these health orders. The order is in conflict with the Premier's and the Health minister's remarks as follows. In section 3, pertaining to private social gathering – it's on page 3 – under 3.4 it says:

Any person who attends a private social gathering at an outdoor public or private place must maintain a minimum physical distance of two metres from any other person attending the private social gathering unless the person is a member of their household.

Now, we know that these members were not all from the same household, and we also know that the table would have had to be over 12 feet in diameter – that's two six-foot-tall people end to end – and that would assume that there would even be spacing by the attendees, which, of course, there was not, in order to have social distancing around that table. Obviously, the table couldn't have complied with the attendance that was there. There was never an opportunity for social distancing, so there was never a plan for social distancing.

We will also note for the record, since there were numerous claims online that other rules such as restaurant patio rules and work meeting rules applied, that they are still in clear violation of these rules. On the outdoor dining rules, it says under 5.5:

An operator of a food-serving business or entity that offers or provides outdoor food and beverage services must:

- (a) limit the number of persons seated at the same table to:
 - (i) a maximum of four persons who are members of the same household; or,
 - (ii) in accordance with section 2.3 of this Order, a maximum of three persons for persons who reside on their own;
- (b) require persons to remain seated while consuming food or beverages and must prohibit persons seated at a table from interacting with persons seated at a different table.

This also means that they violated the patio rules. For the benefit of the members of the House, I will point out the blatant inconsistency between actions taken on the Premier's patio and the actions that Alberta patio operators are required to follow.

Under section 4.3, work meetings, it says:

An operator of a business or entity listed or described in section 4 of Appendix A must limit the number of members of the public that may attend the location where the business or entity is operating to the greater of:

- (a) 15% of the total operational occupant load as determined in accordance with the Alberta Fire Code and the fire authority having jurisdiction; or
- (b) five persons.

Now, we don't know for sure what the fire code limit would be for that patio, but if it was 15 per cent of that number, the number would have to be 50 allowed on that patio, and I don't think that that's probably the case. Then, of course, if this was a work meeting, we see no papers, but we see lots of wine and Scotch. By my count there were eight people on that patio.

Now, the next point was on why this is the first opportunity to review this matter. Mr. Speaker, these remarks were made during the last sitting of the House, during question period, so this is the first opportunity to give notice of this issue as today is the first time we're back in the House since then.

Finally, the final point: why the ministers knew that their remarks were untrue at the time they were given. Mr. Speaker, this one is very simple. We are talking about the Premier and the Health minister. They are part of the special cabinet committee that is first briefed and signs off on these matters. They are regularly featured at the chief medical officer of health's press conferences, and the

minister and Premier spoke at length about the summer reopening plan, so they had to have known the rules. It is their job to know the rules.

This breach of privilege isn't about the actions; it's about what Albertans were told in this House. Now, the Premier and the Health minister have both now admitted that the rules were broken, so, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this makes this point of privilege valid and proven.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of privilege is a serious matter to be raised. Typically in situations like this, the Speaker will provide the individuals impacted or a member on behalf of the government, the opposition, other members of the Assembly that would like to provide comments with respect to that – having just heard the arguments of the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, members can choose to respond today or, if they're so inclined, can take some time and respond tomorrow at the same time, following question period.

I will first turn to the government to see if they would like to respond now or wait till tomorrow.

Mr. McIver: With your permission I'll respond now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise on behalf of the government to address the points raised by the independent Member for Central Peace-Notley. He has alleged that members of the government intentionally broke public health orders and then came into the Chamber and intentionally misled members of the Assembly. This is simply not the case. The hon. member's point of privilege is unfounded.

To establish that a member has misled the Assembly and is therefore in contempt, there has been a test that many Speakers have referred to in the past. I think you have read these conditions, as every Speaker I've ever known has always read these conditions, because it's such a serious matter with a point of privilege. The test which I refer to is found in the third edition of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, 2005, at pages 653 and 654, where it states:

There are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt by reason of a statement that the member has made: The statement must, in fact, have been misleading; it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect; and, in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House.

Having reviewed the record of the proceedings in the Assembly last week, we do not believe the statements made by the Premier or the Minister of Health meet these criteria, and if they don't meet all three steps, then, of course, it doesn't meet the test of a point of privilege.

Earlier today the Premier expressed the following: I was of the clear view that we were compliant with the open-for-summer rules. The Premier also expressed regret and apologized, explaining that earnest and honest efforts to comply with the public health measures may have fallen short at points during the event in question. This does not mean that the Assembly was misled. It certainly does not mean that the Assembly was intentionally misled, based on this information and that *Beauchesne's* 494 states the following. "It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted."

The member opposite claims that health measures were intentionally, purposefully, and knowingly disregarded while the government claims that every reasonable effort was made to observe and comply with the public health measures. Mr. Speaker, even in the arguments the hon. member used phrases like "we don't know for sure" and "it was likely." He's trying to meet something of a high test when in his own remarks he has kind of admitted that he doesn't know what the circumstances are. I strongly urge you to find that a prima facie breach of privilege has not occurred. I think, frankly, just from the member's own remarks, he's kind of demonstrated that that is the case.

The Speaker: We'll now turn to members of the Official Opposition if anyone would like to provide comment. You can provide me notice of comment, or you can provide your remarks now.

3:20

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can provide my comments, and in so doing, I want to begin by saying that I do believe that there was a prima facie breach of privilege.

I will set out the reasons why I think that there was a breach of privilege. Chapter 3 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017, will be the largest part I will be referring to. Chapter 3 starts at page 88, and it lists at page 89 the list of privileges. The most relevant one here is freedom of speech and freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation, and molestation. With respect to freedom of speech, referring to page 97, it's one of the most fundamental privileges that is vested on this House and courts and without which the members of this House won't be able to perform their duties. As I said, it's a very sacred privilege, and it comes with a lot of responsibility as well. On page 97 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, with respect to this privilege and its abuse it states, "There are . . . two kinds of institutions in this land to which this awesome and far-reaching privilege [of freedom of speech] extends – Parliament and the legislatures on the one hand and the courts on the other."

Then it goes on to say:

Paramount to our political and parliamentary systems is the principle of freedom of speech, a member's right to stand in this House unhindered to speak his or her mind. However when debate in the House centres on sensitive issues, as it often does, I would expect that members would always bear in mind the possible effects of their statements and hence be prudent in their tone and choice of words.

I do believe that the words the Premier used in this House with respect to the sky palace party did breach this privilege. As it's stated in chapter 46 of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, the test is three parts, which you also have elaborated on, July 7, 2020, *Hansard*, page 1764. One, the statement was misleading, not true in fact. In this case I think it's very clear that when the Premier was asked about the statements by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, whether he will admit that he broke public health orders and apologize, and the Premier responded, "Well, no, because I did no such thing," that statement was clearly not true. One, I can talk about why it was not true, but earlier today the Premier admitted that he did in fact break public health orders and, by his own admission, it's clear that that statement was misleading. That statement was not true, and a breach of public health orders did in fact happen. The response the Premier provided to any question with respect to a breach of public health rules on that day was that, no, he didn't do anything wrong. Clearly, now we do know from the Premier's own admission as well that that statement was clearly misleading.

The second part of the test, and I do understand that it's a higher bar, talks about intention as well, that the member knew that it was a misleading statement. I think, as I said, that it's a high bar to establish intention, but in this case it has clearly been established, and I will refer to a few things for why the member in question, the Premier, knew that the statement is not correct.

The reason for that is that just the day before that dinner the Premier and the Health minister both were at a press conference and elaborating on the stage 1 open-for-summer rules. Both the Premier and the Health minister were part of making those rules as well because that was clearly within the purview of the Health minister, to come up with these rules on the recommendation of the chief medical officer of health. The Premier is head of the cabinet and Executive Council, so he was part of that decision-making. He knew exactly what the rules were.

While the Premier only focused on the two-metre distancing in his remarks today, there were other health orders that we know and he knew, or he ought to have known, were violated. That two-metre rule was there throughout this pandemic, and it's a rule that pretty much every Albertan, I can say, is aware of. The Premier cannot argue that he was unaware of the rule as he sipped his Jameson or sparkling water. The only instance where a person in the Premier's position, who was involved in making those decisions, could claim that he was not aware of that rule is if he was too high on Jameson and other alcohol to the extent that he can be considered as automaton, where he won't be responsible for his actions, but that's not the case. It was, remember, a working dinner, and there were important decisions being made there.

The existing public health restrictions clearly state that outdoor gatherings must not have an indoor component. This means that attendants are not allowed to go through the Premier's sky palace in order to get to the patio. So unless the Minister of Health, the minister of environment, Finance minister, and the Premier's chief of staff and his deputy chief of staff all scaled the wall or landed a helicopter on the top of the sky palace or used some drone to deliver all those things, they were knowingly in violation of this public health order. The test is that the member knew that it was a misleading statement since the Premier, Health minister, and all, at least four people, at that table were the ones who came up with this rule. So I would submit that they knew, or ought to know, that these rules were breached, and the statements they are making in the House are misleading.

The third part of that is that the member intended to mislead the House. Again, this part also requires that their intention be established there, and that member was misleading the House in making that statement.

As I said with respect to the second part of the test, the Premier was in charge throughout this pandemic. The Health minister – we've got the same Health minister – was in charge throughout this pandemic. These are the people who were making these rules, were responsible for enforcing these rules. When they are in a closed space – closed space in the sense that the patio is not an unlimited space; it's not a huge space – and they are sitting around a table, you cannot have a table up there big enough to accommodate eight people that are two metres apart.

3:30

It was clear to everyone in Alberta that the Premier had violated public health orders, based on just those pictures. It is clear that they were way closer than two metres. To claim otherwise is misleading, and to say it in this Chamber means that the Premier did in fact mislead this House.

The test here will be simply a reasonable person's test. We can establish, on balance of probabilities, that intention was there. I

would like to point out the comments made by the Deputy Speaker of our House and Member for Airdrie-East over the weekend, who said, "Looking at these photos it seems clear to me that several health restrictions were violated." So it's clear to people, to Albertans who are just looking at these pictures, that several health restrictions were broken. Any reasonable person in the shoes of the Premier and the Health minister would know exactly or ought to know what those rules are. When you're sitting that close to each other, you ought to know that you're breaching those rules.

When you come to this House and say, "No, nothing wrong was committed" – in fact, when I asked the question about breaching those rules, the Premier even threatened with defamation, that if I say something like that outside this Chamber, that will amount to a defamation.

Clearly, for the third part of this test – did the member intend to mislead this House? – the answer is yes. Intention is a subjective thing. We need to look into whose intention we are talking about. We are talking about the intention of a person who was involved in that decision-making all along. He knew exactly or ought to know exactly what those rules are. He knew exactly what he was saying in this House, and when he apologized today, he admitted that at times he may have been closer than two metres. But the pictures show that they were closer to each other than two metres at all times. So that statement: I think I would submit that the Premier knew or ought to know that his statement was misleading when he said that no public health orders were broken. He knew it, and everybody else in the province knew it. He just didn't want to face the political fallout from admitting wrongdoing. So he did in fact mislead the House in saying that no rules were broken.

The second thing I would add with respect to freedom from obstruction and interference – there is no set definition, but in chapter 46, Contempt, *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, they define contempt, referring to *Erskine May*, as "any act or omission which obstructs or impedes the House in the performance of its functions." There was another thing that I was looking at with respect to privilege. I was reading, I believe, chapter 3 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, that "all breaches of privilege are contempts of the House, but not all contempts are . . . breaches of privilege." Clearly, a person in authority, a person who is head of the Executive Council of the government of Alberta, when he will make statements which he knew or ought to know are misleading, certainly obstructs the ability of members of this House to do their jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge you to take the specific circumstances of this case into account and find that it is a breach of privilege. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a breach of privilege provides the opportunity for any member of the Assembly to make a submission. Are there others wishing to make a submission? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to my hon. colleague from Central Peace-Notley for bringing such an important issue forward. I, too, absolutely feel that it's a question of privilege and hope that you will find in that way.

Mr. Speaker, it's a question of knowing or not knowing. The evidence is absolutely overwhelming that the Premier and the Minister of Health would have known. It's been 15 months. It's been 15 months of all Albertans social distancing two metres or more apart, wearing our masks, discussing the rules, and doing what we need to do to protect each other and protect ourselves.

Let's look at the Premier's role and the Minister of Health's role in this. Fifteen months of almost daily press conferences with the

chief medical officer of health going over the rules, going over the case counts, the hospitalizations, and the number of people in ICU. Mr. Speaker, also, the Premier and the Minister of Health are on the special cabinet committee that so often met to discuss the rules, the regulations, changing the rules and the regulations. I believe they were two of seven people on this special cabinet committee where for 15 months it's been almost a daily – a daily – happening.

Of course, cabinet: one of the 25 or 30 Albertans that are held responsible for the \$61 billion that they're spending annually and getting the rules and the regulations right, working with the chief medical officer of health and Alberta Health Services. Again, the Premier and the Minister of Health, cabinet, and the special cabinet committee oversee these rules.

Four or five months ago the UCP caucus even set up a special caucus working group to bring in more MLAs and more people, and, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Minister of Health were on that, too. Once again, how could they not have known that they were breaking the rules?

One of my hon. colleagues mentioned the tweets with the new rules just hours before and what we've seen for 15 months on Twitter and Facebook from especially the Premier but the Minister of Health as well. How could they not have known that they were breaking the rules? Mr. Speaker, incompetence or disregard or entitlement. Absolutely. We've seen both the Minister of Health and the Premier speak at great length about what the rules are, how they apply to people, at times, you know, sharing the compassion for everyone that has to go through this.

When we stop and realize that for 15 months, again, it has been the UCP cabinet, the special cabinet committee, sometimes called PIC, the special caucus working group, every day the media message with the chief medical officer of health at 4 or 4:30 or 4:45, Mr. Speaker, the reasonable test is that there is no doubt that the Premier and the Minister of Health knew what the rules are.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, as I have mentioned on a number of occasions, a point of privilege of such nature is a significant accusation to make. I think it's best for all members of the Assembly and our House that I take some time to carefully consider the arguments made here this afternoon. I will report back to the House at my pleasure.

Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

3:40

Orders of the Day

Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills

Bill 214

Eastern Slopes Protection Act

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to the concurrence on Bill 214, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, welcome. It is certainly a pleasure because we know that this is something that Albertans have been asking for and Albertans have been clear about with this government. It is very clear, I think, to members of this opposition, at least, and it appears, actually, that it is also clear to many members of the government caucus that this UCP government is not listening.

This UCP government is not listening to Albertans. In fact, the government's own survey results showed – and they consulted, I believe, with over 20,000 Albertans – that the vast majority of Albertans want to prohibit coal mining on the eastern slopes. Madam Speaker, even the chair of the government's own coal panel, Ron Wallace, said that he had to plead with the minister to stop the exploration permits that the UCP issued to build hundreds of kilometres of roads and drill pits in the sensitive eastern slopes.

Madam Speaker, when we look at this record, when we look at the pattern of behaviour from this government, when we look at the inability of this government to actually listen to Albertans and actually understand what Albertans are asking for, we can see very clearly that this bill must proceed. We can see very clearly that this government needs to have checks and balances put in place so that we can protect our slopes, so that we can protect our mountains.

Madam Speaker, at the private members' bills and public bills committee on this bill members of the directly affected areas – we saw members such as UCP MLAs for Banff-Kananaskis, for Highwood, for Lethbridge-East – all voted against it. They refused to hear from Albertans and their constituents on why Albertans were concerned about this, right?

When the opposition proposed this bill, one of the things that the opposition asked for was to have more debate and to have those same Albertans who are going to be most impacted by this bill be able to present to the committee and actually tell their legislators and consult with these Albertans on why these issues are important. The UCP government, again showing their colours, I think, voted down all attempts to bring in stakeholders, all attempts to do consultations, all attempts to actually listen to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, again, it's not just members of the opposition caucus at this point that are telling the government and letting the government know that they are doing a bad job of consulting. We've seen it time and time again from members of the government caucus saying this, that the government is not respecting Albertans enough. In fact, just I believe it was on Thursday, the Calgary caucus chair of the UCP resigned his position as Calgary caucus chair so that he could better advocate for his constituents in Calgary. If the government caucus members are not even able to advocate to their ministers, then how can we expect Albertans to?

Madam Speaker, it is very clear. Our beautiful Rocky Mountains need to be protected. They need to have measures in place, and this bill will do that. There's a consensus from Albertans on this matter and maybe an unprecedented consensus. Whether it's indigenous communities, farmers and ranchers, municipalities in the mountains and foothills, including from Clearwater county, that the minister of environment represents, including High River, that another member here represents – both the municipalities and Calgary have all passed resolutions that the eastern slopes should be protected and the headwaters in the eastern slopes should be protected for future generations. When we look at this consensus across the entire province, it seems clear that everybody is telling this government, including members of the government caucus, that they need to slow down and bring in some protections.

It's a real shame that we didn't have the opportunity to debate that more thoroughly at committee. It's a real shame that we didn't have the opportunity to hear from stakeholders, to hear from some of those municipalities, to hear from some of those impacted Albertans, to hear from some of those farmers and ranchers. Madam Speaker, again, that is a pattern from this government. It's something that we've seen time and time again from this government. It seems that this government is not willing to listen. Perhaps I simply don't understand. Perhaps I'm simply misinformed on what the government's priorities are, but I certainly think that hearing from Albertans about why they deserve to have

their eastern slopes protected is more important than lavish parties in the sky palace.

I think it simply does not make sense that the government is willing to have three-and-a-half-hour meetings where they're drinking four bottles of wine and a forty of whisky – 40 drinks of whisky, Madam Speaker – instead of spending that same amount of time actually engaging with Albertans on these issues, actually engaging with Albertans on protecting the eastern slopes, protecting our headwaters, protecting our provincial treasures, right? That's what this is about. It's about ensuring that we have the ability to put checks and balances in place that this government refuses to acknowledge, that this government refuses to move forward with.

Albertans don't trust this government, and who can blame them, right? Who can blame Albertans for not trusting this government when UCP caucus members are openly talking about how they can no longer sit in their positions as the caucus chair, the Calgary caucus chair, and so many more UCP MLAs have said things such as that the government is unreachable or that they cannot talk to ministers? Who can blame Albertans for not trusting this government? We hear time and time again that UCP MLAs are unable to get through to their own ministers, and now we can see that Albertans were unable to get through to their ministers. Albertans were unable to have their voices heard at committee. Albertans were unable to have their perspectives seen. The stakeholders, the people that are most directly impacted by these coal-mining related activities, that live in the eastern slopes and work and make a living in the eastern slopes, Madam Speaker, are all unable to get through to this government.

That's why our party, our leader brought forward Bill 214, right? That's why the Eastern Slopes Protection Act is here before us today, because it is so important that we use our voice as members of this Assembly, that we use our voice as legislators to push through and say: "You know what? We do need to hold this government to account." We do need to ensure that this government is listening. We do need to bring in checks and balances that this government wants to blaze through and wants to ignore. Indeed, we do need to have these systems in place. Madam Speaker, I really do think it's important that this bill proceed. I really do think it's important that this bill be allowed to have fulsome debate in this place. I really do think it's important that the government stop and listen about this bill.

The government perhaps can't hear from the sky palace – it's pretty high up there – but let me tell you that Albertans are screaming about this, right? I cannot tell you, Madam Speaker, how many phone calls I get about this, how many e-mails I get about this, how many letters I get about this, how many fax messages I get about this. I've legitimately received fax messages about protecting our eastern slopes, and let me tell you. I don't receive a lot of fax messages that aren't, well, usually spam or something. But the ones that I do receive: you know that these people are serious. You know that Albertans are worked up about this. You know that Albertans want to protect their eastern slopes and don't want the UCP government allowing coal mining in these areas. They want protections in place. They want the government to listen. They want the government to actually stop and slow down.

Madam Speaker, we saw some of that. We saw a softening of that, but what we didn't see is a commitment to the protection measures, right? What we didn't see is a commitment to ensuring that the coal policy would be robust, that the coal policy would actually prohibit this type of mining in the future. That's why we've brought forward the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. That's why this is so important. That's why it is so essential that the government slow down, listen to Albertans, listen to the opposition, listen to the

independents, listen to their own caucus, listen to their backbenchers.

3:50

I know that's something that is unusual. I know that there were no backbenchers in the sky palace talking with the Premier when he was having his four bottles of wine there, but maybe that's not the best place to get to him anyways. Maybe the best place to tell him and tell this government that this issue is important is going to be in this Chamber, right? That's going to be by voting forward this bill. It's going to be by allowing this bill to proceed. It's going to ensure that we protect our eastern slopes. It's going to be advocating on behalf of their constituents because, Madam Speaker, we know that this government does not like to listen. We know that this government does not like to be told that they are wrong. We know that this government doesn't like to apologize. But all of those things have happened on this bill. The government refused to listen. The government was told they were wrong. The government was then forced to withdraw their strip-mining policy and apologize.

Now we see Bill 214, which we want to move forward with because it would prevent the government from making such a serious misstep again, right? [Mr. Dang's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, what is a fax machine?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments on the motion for concurrence on Bill 214. First of all, let me thank my friend from Edmonton-South for his thoughtful comments in debate. I want to cover just two points. Since we only have a few minutes allotted to deal with this issue, I want to make two points as to why I believe that it's proper for the Legislature to allow for debate on the Eastern Slopes Protection Act to proceed.

The first is that it's my belief as well as all members of the Official Opposition that this bill represents the opinion of the people of Alberta on the matter of the future of coal mining in our province. The second part that I want to address is the fact that the Alberta Energy Regulator is riddled with problems. I think that adopting this piece of legislation will go some way to addressing some of the many, many problems that exist at the Alberta Energy Regulator.

Now, to my first point, it's my strong belief that this piece of legislation represents exactly where the people of Alberta are with respect to how and where coal mining, if at all, should proceed in the province of Alberta. Now, this piece of legislation states quite clearly that, if passed, there would be no coal mining under any circumstances under those categories of land in the eastern slopes that are categorized in the Peter Loughheed 1976 coal policy as category 1 and category 2 lands. Now, those lands roughly correspond with the national parks, some of the provincial parks and recreation areas as well as landscapes that were deemed in the 1976 policy as being extremely sensitive and not worth endangering through coal mining.

Furthermore, this piece of legislation also would require, if passed, that any future coal mines in category 3 and category 4 lands could only proceed once comprehensive land-use plans had been put in place for those areas that include definitive statements on coal mining: where it could happen, under what conditions, those sorts of things.

I think this position to coal mining, an outright ban on category 1 and 2 lands and allowing coal mining on category 3 and 4 lands only when comprehensive land-use plans have been put in place for

those areas, is exactly in step with where the public of Alberta is on this issue. We know from the release of the survey that the coal consultation committee put out in the middle of May that tens of thousands of Albertans are extremely well informed on this issue and have very strong opinions on it. Even though the coal committee created what was probably one of the most loaded surveys in the history of government surveys in this province, Albertans responded quite clearly and unequivocally in favour of protecting our eastern slopes and against the thought, against the idea of coal mining in these areas. I can't remember the exact numbers, Madam Speaker, but I think it was . . .

Ms Pancholi: Ninety per cent.

Mr. Schmidt: . . . 90 per cent, I hear my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud telling us, saying that there should be no coal mining in the Rocky Mountains under any circumstances.

The people of Alberta were also quite clear that they don't believe that coal mining can coexist peacefully, shall we say, with adequate water management, adequate land stewardship management, a vibrant tourism industry, and a vibrant agriculture industry. It's extremely distressing to me to hear the minister and her colleagues in Executive Council continue to try to separate these issues of land use and water use from the issue of coal mining.

In fact, I was quite distressed when I heard the minister of environment say, in response to a question from my friend from Calgary-Mountain View the other day in question period on this matter, that coal policy has nothing to do with water policy. I see my friend from Lethbridge-West react in shock to that statement. I will tell you, Madam Speaker, that most Albertans who heard that statement reacted with the same shock that my friend from Lethbridge-West just demonstrated. Everybody who has raised the issue and talked about their concerns around coal mining in the eastern slopes has mentioned water as their number one concern, the number one impact that coal mining could have.

It was interesting, Madam Speaker. I had the opportunity to participate in a panel on which a number of rural councillors were represented this weekend. The reeve of the MD of Pincher Creek essentially stated that he brought forward a motion at a recent meeting of the rural municipalities association that says: "You know, you could have coal mines, or you could have clean water. We support the idea of having clean water. Will you vote in favour of this?" Almost all of the rural municipalities present stated that they support the idea of clean water.

You know, this piece of legislation should be debated, Madam Speaker, because it offers the government a lifeline. I don't know if you've been paying attention, but this government is not particularly popular at the moment. One of the issues that has contributed to this stunning unpopularity is its dogged pursuit of coal mining in the eastern slopes. As my friend from Edmonton-South has stated, even former members of that caucus have expressed concerns with the government's direction on coal mining in the eastern slopes. My colleague from Central Peace-Notley stated it as one of the reasons that he resigned his position as caucus chair, his discontent with the government's direction on coal mining in the eastern slopes and his feeling of being shut out of the discussion when the government continues to pursue this policy.

The government has an easy out here. They can just allow this piece of legislation to be debated, pass it, and then move on to the other issues of public policy that the people of Alberta are demanding be dealt with. The government has lit enough fires, I think, in its 18 months of office. It astounds me that they're not interested in putting this one out and trying to deal with the other ones.

So I hope that the government agrees that this debate should be held and should be held as quickly as possible. I know the minister continues to point to her coal consultation committee as the proper process by which this matter should be dealt with. Again, we know where the people of Alberta stand on this issue. There's nothing more that the coal consultation committee needs to hear. It's all represented in this bill, and we should pass this bill as quickly as possible.

But not only does this piece of legislation solve a political problem for the government; it solves a public policy problem with respect to the Alberta Energy Regulator. It was interesting to me. One of the members of the coal consultation committee – I believe it was Ron Wallace – was on CBC Radio. Now, I know that many of the members opposite don't listen to CBC Radio because they believe it's just communist propaganda, but this member was on CBC Radio talking about his concerns with the Alberta Energy Regulator's ability to properly regulate the practice of coal mining in the province of Alberta. I think the people of Alberta are right to have concerns with the way the Energy Regulator carries out its work.

4:00

I was shocked last week to find some Facebook pictures posted by Kevin Van Tighem and colleagues, who took a hike up in the Crowsnest Pass. Some of the exploration roads that were carved by coal mining companies who are seeking to mine coal in the eastern slopes left massive erosion problems. They've got a serious number of uncapped exploration wells.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hopefully, I get to clarifying some of the comments and misinformation I've been hearing from the members opposite here. I just want to speak in support of the Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills Committee recommendation that Bill 214 proceed to second reading. As a member of this committee I did have a chance to review this bill. Within that review, as a committee, just to clarify here, we did unanimously vote to move this bill forward, which, in line with our parliamentary traditions, procedures, and convention, would give members of this House, the people's elected representatives, a full chance to debate this bill in second reading.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I'm rather confused as to why we're now debating concurrence on this bill after a unanimous recommendation of this committee for it to go to second reading. Now, I know some opposite will point to our concurrence debate on 212, and that's true. I believe they mentioned that at the time they thought it was a waste of time. However, that was not a unanimous recommendation that came from the committee on concurrence even though it did pass. The committee wanted members of the House to have an opportunity to debate both sides on the recommendation of that concurrence.

These two situations are quite different in relation to debate on concurrence. I'm not sure what we're doing here right now. Considering the limited time that we already have for private members' business and how important that is to members, we could be dealing with other business on the Order Paper and actually getting things done. Rather, we are debating concurrence on something that had bipartisan unanimous support. It makes a person wonder why the Official Opposition wanted concurrence debate on this at all. [interjections] My instincts suggest that perhaps they would like the House to look . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. members, previous speakers had an opportunity to say what they wanted to without interruptions. I

hope we can afford the same respect for the hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: I'll proceed, Madam Speaker. My instinct suggests that perhaps they would like to make this House look polarized on this issue and divide it, yet I can see that this government is listening to Albertans regarding coal. The minister has paused all exploration and permits on category 2 lands in order to allow the time for this important discussion. When it comes to the justification for concurrence on this bill, I've never claimed to understand any kind of socialist approach from the members opposite. I support the committee's recommendation for concurrence because I feel that the committee's review of this bill was sufficient.

That being said, Madam Speaker, I would like to address something that I feel is a bit odd in addressing some of the statements from the members opposite in which I heard from Edmonton-South: "Slow down. It's time to listen to Albertans. Allow those people time to speak. We shouldn't be pushing anything through the Legislature." Now, it's funny that we're sitting here, and when Albertans have a chance to have this open public consultation from all across the province and approach the coal committee, the NDP has taken their chance – I'll quote the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, in which he stated that they know exactly where people are in relation to coal and that this is exactly in step with everything. In his quote: we know where Albertans stand. I would question how. He hasn't gone to public consultation. Actually, he hasn't spoken to anybody. Maybe he hasn't actually spoken to anybody in my riding. I know a lot of the ranchers and farmers that have concerns that I've spoken to. They didn't consult with the NDP.

With that, I think the most important thing is – and it was also brought up through the survey, the online survey that was given. One of the number one things brought up was that all – all – Albertans wanted to be a part of this consultation and that all Albertans wanted the chance to submit to the committee and talk to the committee; all, not just the ones that contacted the members opposite and not the ones that were maybe just the noisiest on social media. All Albertans. I've been working to speak to as many residents and concerned individuals as possible. Throughout these conversations there was one theme that was abundantly clear. I repeat: all Albertans wanted to be consulted before anything is decided. That is what we're doing as a government right now through the coal policy review.

Now, I'll state again how important this issue is that I supported this bill to come to the House. Now, I also believe that this democratic process is important and that the bills on such an important topic should be debated by the people in this House. Everyone, like I said, should have that chance. I mean, even the member opposite that brought this bill to the Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills Committee openly admitted that she had not spoken to everyone. Even more importantly, she admitted to not consulting with all of our First Nations, even more specifically the chief of the Piikani Nation. She hadn't even spoken to him. That's why I'm saying that it's important that all Albertans are a part of this conversation. That's what I promised my residents of Highwood that I would do, make sure that all Albertans have the chance to speak on this. I feel, as many of my colleagues do, that this is a topic that does need to be debated. I do agree that we need to take more time with regard to this bill, continue to listen to all Albertans.

Due to the lack of consultation by the member opposite on this bill, I think we also need to recognize within this all the important work that is being done by the coal consultation committee through their survey. Now, I want to make sure we read all of these key

issues forward. The members opposite brought a couple but not all. They have expressed – the majority of Albertans feel the management of the province's coal resources affects them. They also feel that – environmental impacts of coal development and where coal development takes place were ranked as important issues. We need to discuss that. That's what the coal committee is working on. The majority of respondents feel that there are areas of the province that may not be appropriate for coal development while almost one-third of respondents say that there are areas of the province where responsible development could occur.

With that, Albertans would also participate in online surveys and virtual meetings – this was number four, they said – as well as provide input directly to the committee. It was one of their principal issues they wanted to do, that they wanted to speak to the committee on this. Respondents want to learn more about the approval process for exploration and development as well as coal categories and dictate where and how coal leasing, exploration, development can occur. The majority of respondents expressed concerns. We're trying to address those concerns through the coal consultation committee.

I know that my residents – though the members opposite say that I don't answer my e-mails, I answered every single one of my residents that came to me. I phoned as many as I could as fast as I could, with all the other issues going on. I spoke to the mayor of High River, Craig Snodgrass. Corb Lund isn't even in my riding. I spoke to him. I talked to ranchers all the way down through Pincher Creek. I did not ignore them. I understood, and I listened, and we're working with it.

We've taken that pause. We have a coal consultation committee together. The work that they're doing is going to be incredibly important. I'm glad that we're taking the time and we've paused everything in category 2 lands, exploration and development, so we can have this important conversation. I hope that we involve all Albertans, not just the ones that approach the NDP. All Albertans.

It's funny that they've rushed a bill and they have – sorry, Madam Speaker – the arrogance to think that they represent all Albertans through this bill. I challenge that it isn't. But having said that, though I disagree with a lot of the parts of the way their consultation has gone through and the arrogance that they think they represent every Albertan somehow . . .

4:10

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

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

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise under 23(j). I think that certainly the hon. member, as you can see, has caused some disorder in this place and is using abusive or insulting language, specifically calling members of the opposition arrogant, which I would also suggest may impute or make allegations against members. I think that certainly the member should refrain from referring to the opposition caucus in such a manner as it is likely to create more disorder in this place.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. This is not a point of order. There is no – no individual member was mentioned. It is simply not a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: While I don't find this a point of order, I will take this opportunity to perhaps point out that members of the opposition may be creating some disorder throughout this debate and should take note of that. I will caution the hon. member who is speaking in the words that he is using, and we will continue with the debate.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As you can tell, I'm very passionate about this as somebody who has spent an enormous amount of time in this area of the province, specifically relating to the eastern slopes. I've raised my children there, hunted there, hiked more kilometres than – I do believe I'd challenge anybody in this House. I fish there, everything. We are very passionate about it. I'm very passionate about protecting the eastern slopes, and I know our government is working in the same manner to ensure that that happens.

Now, having said that, Madam Speaker, I'll just quickly close in stating that though I disagree with the lack of complete consultation by the member opposite on this private bill, I would encourage my colleagues to vote in favour of this concurrence. I think it is time that we do have this important debate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 214, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, being read in this House, and I will begin my comments and the reasons for that with my – I have some concerns about road safety on highway 2. It appears that the hon. Member for Highwood drives up highway 2 with his eyes closed. The fact of the matter is that I just drove up this morning, and I've been doing it, you know, since January here, when the banners, when the signs, when the – there are no car magnets driving around in southwest Alberta. It's just everywhere: water, not mines; protect our mountains. They're on farmers' fences. There's a big one on the side of a van in Claresholm outside of a restaurant.

Madam Speaker, you cannot miss how people in southern Alberta feel about their backyard being strip-mined for a bunch of Australian carpetbagger billionaires who did a handshake in the backrooms with this government. The fact of the matter is that there are so many municipalities in particular but ordinary people as well who have absolutely no time for this plan, for this secret plan that they hatched. It's very clear because there were a number of meetings with a number of ministers prior to the rescission of the 1976 policy that they did on a Friday of a May long weekend, the traditional time for being open and transparent with the public. They did this on a Friday afternoon. They dropped it, and landowners, others spent that weekend – you know, they interacted with me; I'm sure they interacted with the government as well – saying: what does this mean? It was very clear very quickly what it actually means.

And then what happens? That fall Environment and Parks goes out on a so-called water allocation consultation. They present a PowerPoint saying, you know: "I will have this holdback for environmental use above the dam, but the rest of this water, up to 50 per cent of it, can be used for industrial use. What do you think, municipalities?" They said, "Yeah; I'm not sure I like it." That's what farmers and ranchers said. That's what grazing lease holders said. That's what municipalities said. Certainly, indigenous

communities were similarly unamused. That was on November 20. Presentation to municipalities was reported in the media by December 7, Madam Speaker. I have heard the minister, and I think the – I certainly heard the environment minister then stand at his place and say that no such thing occurred. That is false. That the municipalities were engaged in such a discussion to use all of those water volumes for industrial use and allow them to be used by coal companies was not a figment of those municipalities' imaginations.

Now, this is just, Madam Speaker, the latest in a series of unbelievable, unfathomable boondoggles and fiascos coming out of the Department of Energy, and that is why we need this bill to come forward and we need to make sure that people are heard on this, because people have had, quite frankly, enough of the serial incompetence coming out of this particular ministry. Let's just go through a quick list: the war room that has just become an international embarrassment that has been overseen by this Ministry of Energy; the Keystone XL bet of at least a billion dollars – we have no idea how much more because this Ministry of Energy will not tell us – a bet on Donald Trump winning the White House – well, that worked out well – over a billion dollars in accounting errors that apparently the ministry just sort of spaced on; the now, I think, third extension . . .

Mr. Nielsen: Fourth.

Ms Phillips: . . . fourth extension, rather – I'm sorry; it's very hard to keep track – and a million dollars over budget of the similarly embarrassing, ridiculous, and very strange choice for Mr. Allan to choose this as the coda to his career and his reputation of the inquiry, which we know now is just a politically motivated, ridiculous performance art exercise that has cost us near to \$4 million.

Then we come upon coal. The fact is that this issue – I have never seen an issue such as this animate people in southwest Alberta. I spoke of the signs on fences, the banners on vehicles, on the sides of houses. I've seen people making their own signs. I found one the other day in my riding, No to Coal on Niitsitapi Land, over on the north side of Lethbridge on Stafford Drive. There's a teahouse or, like, a house in Nanton that has their own sign as well, Protect the East Slopes. They're everywhere, Madam Speaker. People are making their own. They're ordering them. They're doing heaven knows what. They are making themselves heard. Volunteers are dropping leaflets. My mother, 72 years old, has been dropping leaflets, but there are dozens of folks. They are using their pandemic citizenship to drop leaflets. They are telling people across southern Alberta just how important this is.

Now, the hon. member across the way said: oh, you haven't consulted everyone. Well, darn near, close. Airdrie, Red Deer, Okotoks, High River, Foothills county, Nanton, Calgary, Ranchland, Pincher MD. That's just a partial list of the municipalities that have in fact passed motions against this government's plan on the coal policy. So if that hon. member would like to stand in his place and somehow allege that the voices of those municipalities don't constitute real consultation – because here's what they're asking for, Madam Speaker, at least the city of Lethbridge is. They're asking for almost to the word what is contained within this bill. This bill is just a result of what we've heard from so many of those. You know, it's not the exact letter, because, as it turns out, municipalities don't write letters to the Premier in the form of a private member's bill. That is a ridiculous argument from a ridiculous group of people who are not listening to Albertans, just to be clear.

Now, here's what city council has asked for in February, from my city that I am happy to represent in this House, and I am happy

to report what they are saying. I will not run away from my responsibility to be responsive to them. They want to have a reinstatement of the 1976 coal policy. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Only the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the floor. If there is a conversation that is going to continue in this Chamber, perhaps you should leave and have it there.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. They want a thorough and complete analysis of water quality impacts. They want a full stop on any and all watershed water allocation amendments. They want support of stop-work orders for all existing exploration. Also, at their October 19 meeting city council voted unanimously to have the mayor send a letter to the government highlighting the city council's concerns regarding water quality, referencing the joint review panel on Grassy. Much of that is reflected in this bill as well with respect to water allocation and so on.

4:20

Now, here's the thing, Madam Speaker. I cannot understand why members from southwest Alberta will continue to carry water – the only water left, mind you – for this Premier on this coal plan. I cannot understand why, at a time when it's very clear that this government is lamentably unpopular, they will stand up for a policy that the vast majority of their own constituents oppose. When it is time to get back out there and door-knock, I invite these members to go around with this private member's bill and say: "Hey, this is what I support. This is what I would like to see happen." That might save them from some very difficult conversations come election time.

Certainly, the Member for Central Peace-Notley had absolutely no problem speaking out. He had the bravery to do it, Madam Speaker, but we don't see that level of courage coming from the rest of the MLAs, the ones who represent people who drink that water that is going to be affected by selenium contamination, who use that water as part of making a living, as part of the irrigation districts, as part of ranching. We don't see that level of courage from those MLAs. We see it from the Member for Central Peace-Notley, who's now sitting by himself over there, a thousand kilometres away. He had the courage to speak up and speak out, but I'm not seeing anything from folks who represent the town of Nanton, the MD of Ranchland, the MD of Pincher Creek, High River, Foothills county, Red Deer, Okotoks.

This is to say, Madam Speaker, that I have heard precious little from the other side speaking in favour of and supporting the judicial review application that has come from Piikani, Blood, Siksika, where they went into court and they said: whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa; you rescinded this policy without even a modicum of consultation.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in support of this motion for concurrence with the report from the private members' bills and public – you know, the committee that recommended that this bill go forward. It is remarkable to me that on this issue, the coal issue – if there has been one issue that has galvanized, yes, all Albertans in unanimous opposition to one action taken by this government, it has been its decision to repeal the 1976 coal policy quietly, secretly and to do that on the Friday before a May long weekend. I am a newly elected

MLA, Madam Speaker, as are many members of this House, only been in this role for two years, but I have never seen anything like that.

The very fact that we still have UCP MLAs standing up in this Assembly, UCP MLAs that represent areas most directly affected by the decision to rescind this 1976 coal policy, claiming that we need to hear from all Albertans on this issue – I wonder, Madam Speaker, where that member was, where these UCP MLAs were when their own government decided to repeal that 1976 coal policy quite secretly, quite quietly, trying to sneak that in. They're standing up in this Assembly and saying that they need to hear from Albertans and to be critical of the members of the opposition, the hon. member who brought forward this bill, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, which represents the views of, yes, almost all Albertans, in fact, by their own survey, 90 per cent of Albertans.

This is an issue upon which there has never been, I think, this much unanimous agreement. We in Alberta have plenty of issues which we can have differing perspectives on. On this issue it has been quite unanimous, so it is remarkable to me, Madam Speaker, to hear members of the government caucus stand up in outrage that the NDP opposition and this private member's bill say exactly what we're hearing overwhelmingly from Albertans and to say: oh, we need to do consultation on that. Where was that critique when their own government repealed that 1976 coal policy, galvanizing Albertans across the province in outrage? Where was that concern about consultation then? We heard silence – silence – and for a good year almost. It's only very recently that this government decided to take a step backwards on their decision to rescind that policy.

That decision, by the way, Madam Speaker, by the government to actually take a step back and say, "Oops; we made a mistake," is the very best evidence that, yes, almost all Albertans are united on this because we know that this government doesn't change track easily. We know that they don't like to listen to Albertans, so the very fact that they did make an admission that it was an error for them to repeal this 1976 coal policy without talking to Albertans and to allow, more importantly, not even just without talking to Albertans but to allow for exploration and mining on the eastern slopes of the Rockies, which all Albertans seem to be very strongly against: that is the admission of the fact that they are hearing from all Albertans, that they are hearing from Albertans in all of the ridings represented by so many of these southern UCP MLAs. There's the proof. This government actually had to take a step back.

What this bill does, Madam Speaker, is to simply enshrine what an overwhelming majority of Albertans have said very clearly: they do not want coal mining on the eastern slopes of the Rockies. They have spoken with a unanimous voice. To continue to hear the UCP challenge that, well, it just goes to show how deeply buried those earplugs are in their skulls, because to pretend that they are not aware, that they did not know that this issue would be so upsetting and cause so much outrage from Albertans and Albertans on a number of different issues as well. This is the key.

Yes, I represent an urban riding, yet the constituents in my riding care deeply about the preservation of the eastern slopes of the Rockies. Yes, they will even acknowledge that maybe they are not most directly affected because they won't be drinking the water that comes down from those coal mines, that it won't be affecting their livelihoods. But our eastern slopes of our Rockies are paramount to Albertans. It's something that we care deeply about. We all have an ownership and an attachment and an investment in our eastern slopes.

I want to comment, Madam Speaker, because I know that there will be Albertans who won't know some of the procedural elements that go on in this House. I admit that it's taken me some time to learn, and I'm still learning. Yes, it's true that the UCP members of

the private members' bills committee did vote in favour of concurrence, and that is a good thing. However, let's be clear. This was the first private member's bill brought forward by a member of the opposition which received support from the UCP to go forward for debate. Why did they do that, Madam Speaker? Two reasons: one, because they knew that this bill would never make it to the light of day, to the Assembly to actually be debated.

They knew exactly what they were doing. They knew that because of the fact of the way our procedures work, that when this session ends, this bill will die on the Order Paper. It will likely never go, at this point, for debate, so it was an easy win for them to say: oh, yeah; we support it. They know that having to be on the record supporting measures to protect the eastern Rockies is pretty important to their political future right now because they've seen it jeopardized by their actions, by their government to date, so it was a pretty simple act to say, "Sure, we vote in concurrence," knowing that we'll never have to debate this bill on the floor of the Legislature. That's a procedural thing that they're not going to disclose to this Assembly.

Mr. Sigurdson: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Sigurdson: I think it's under 23, imputes false motives, in the fact that she's actually imputing something that she can't presuppose. At this point in time this bill is in the normal order for private members' business and will proceed. She's implying that this government somehow has this nefarious – we only voted it through for that reason, that it's never going to see the light of day, and thus I call a point of order.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think, clearly, this is not a point of order. I think this is a matter of debate. We've seen a considerable amount of debate today that involves talking about the process in which this bill was debated at committee and the process in which we will continue to debate it in this place if it is to move forward on these Monday afternoons. I think, clearly, the hon. member is simply speaking to that process and speaking to the context around that process, and that is clearly a matter of debate and not a point of order.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: I was wondering when this point of order might be called in listening to debate. However, I say that not making a ruling in favour of a point of order, but I say that it is dangerously close to casting unavowed motives towards members of this Assembly. While you didn't specifically direct it at a specific member – that is why I find it not a point of order – I'll just express some caution around the language used in your debate to not cause disorder.

I will ask now for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to finish her remarks.

Debate Continued

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The other issue that needs to be raised is that if the members of the government were committed to having a fulsome debate around Bill 214, they would

have voted in favour of the opportunity to have an emergency debate on this floor, as we called for. We sought unanimous consent to have that debate, so all the members of the committee who vote in favour of concurrence should have been in support of the idea of actually having that debate when we could, before this bill died on the Order Paper. Unanimous consent was not received. Government members voted against the opportunity to have that debate on the floor. This is why we're debating this now in terms of concurrence. This is why it's important to have this conversation, because we may not have the opportunity in this legislative session to have this discussion.

Bill 214 represents what the vast majority of Albertans have said. They've said it with their e-mails, they've said it with their phone calls, they've said it with their letters, they've said it with their signs, they've said it with their billboards and car magnets and all the other ways that Albertans across the province are. I do not think it is helpful to the debate to pretend like this is something that's only affecting the individuals in the ridings represented by Official Opposition members. That is patently incorrect, Madam Speaker. We know that. We know that Albertans across this province have spoken out, saying that they do not want coal mining in protected lands on the eastern slopes. This bill does that. This bill gives voice and protects in law the eastern slopes of the Rockies. That's what it does, what Albertans have said they want.

What they don't want is the ability for any government to secretly and quietly repeal a policy anymore. They want it in law because, once again, Madam Speaker, this is an issue of trust. In ways that are deeply profound, this government continues to break the trust of Albertans, and they did it on something that was critical and fundamental to who they identify as as Albertans. It is our mountains, our lands, what we are so proud of as Albertans. They broke that faith by repealing that policy. This bill would not have been necessary had the government had the integrity to keep in place a policy that protected the eastern slopes as Albertans want. But because of that, because of the fact that they repealed it quietly, Albertans spoke, and they made it very clear that they do not want this.

This is not a partisan issue as much as perhaps the members across the way would like to paint this as one. There has been no issue that I have seen in the two years that I've been in here that has been so clearly nonpartisan. This is an issue that all Albertans care about, and they've made that very clear. The intent of this bill was to protect that.

We may not get an opportunity to debate this bill on the floor of this Legislative Assembly, but if the members of the government are true to their word that they care about their eastern slopes, then they won't look to a sham consultation process, which is exactly what we've had from the Minister of Energy, but they will actually look to preserve this bill and to actually move this forward. I hope maybe they'll have another opportunity to accept a request for an emergency debate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the final few moments of debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the previous speakers. I don't have a ton of time, but I do always have the tradition since the onset of the COVID pandemic to just give a shout-out at the beginning of any of my remarks the first time I speak in a week to the front-line workers out there and to all the essential workers who continue to do incredible work. I just don't want us to forget about them.

You know, it's hard to follow the previous speakers today. In particular, I was quite moved by the comments from my fantastic colleague from Lethbridge-West, who passionately has been standing up for southern Albertans in this House because it appears to many of us that those MLAs that represent those areas, those UCP MLAs, are not willing to do so. I appreciate her calling them out for their lack of action, for their lack of consultation with the communities that they represent.

The previous speakers in the House today on our side of the House have made it quite clear that there is an absolute consensus when it comes to Bill 214 and when it comes to the work that has gone into this piece of private member's legislation as well as the work that's been done by my fantastic . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt but the debate time has now lapsed.

I will now put the question.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Bill 215 Seniors Advocate Act

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, on April 22, 2021, the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills presented the report of the committee on Bill 215, the Seniors Advocate Act, and requested concurrence of the Assembly of the report, which recommended that the bill proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on April 22, 2021, debate on the motion will proceed today.

The motion to concur in the committee's report on Bill 215 has already been moved, and I will therefore now recognize any additional members who wish to speak. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to join debate on this concurrence motion. Of course, I myself am on the private members' bill committee and do support the motion to go forward and am also the one who introduced this Bill 215, the Seniors Advocate Act.

I must say that this is something that I hear from many people across Alberta. I've heard from people on Zoom meetings. I've heard from people, you know, when they've called me on the phone or e-mails, direct messages on Twitter, Facebook. This seems to really galvanize a lot of Albertans, that our province does need an independent seniors advocate, which is what this bill advocates for.

Of course, in 2017, when we were government and I had the honour of being the Minister of Seniors and Housing, we created a stand-alone office of the Seniors Advocate, and that was a huge step forward for seniors in our province. We had a champion who was watching the issues that came forward for seniors, doing research regarding some of the barriers, perhaps, to access services, really speaking up for seniors in this province.

You know, this bill is now very much needed because when this UCP government was elected, one of the first things they did was that they terminated that position. They terminated that office, and there was no longer a champion for seniors in Alberta. That's why this is so important, and I beseech all members of the House to vote in support of this. Seniors really do need an advocate in this province.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Certainly, some of the groups that I spoke to regarding this – the National Association of Federal Retirees: they have about 12,000 members here in Alberta. The Canadian Association of Retired

Persons, also known as CARP, their Alberta chapter: they're actually doing a campaign across our country to support a seniors advocate in each province.

4:40

This is a very widespread sort of campaign interest of Albertans who want seniors to be supported. We know, of course, that seniors built this province, and they deserve to retire in dignity. Sadly, there are some issues for sure that seniors face that need to be addressed.

Since the termination of that stand-alone office, really, we've heard nothing from this government. What the UCP have said is actually: oh, we still do have a Seniors Advocate, but it's housed within the Health Advocate's office. That just seems to be in words only, I'm sad to say, because, you know, that advocate has never really spoken up. I've heard nothing from her at all regarding her advocacy for seniors across this province.

This has been, you know, during a pandemic where, really, seniors have been hurt the most in our province. We know that about more than 1,250 seniors have died in continuing care, and I have heard so many heartbreaking stories from family members, from friends about seniors being left neglected, being left in their own waste for long periods of time, given food but they're not able to feed themselves, and often left for hours on end all alone, with no social interaction. Certainly, I've even heard very tragic stories of seniors dying alone.

If this isn't the time for the Seniors Advocate, which the UCP says we have, to speak out, I don't know when is. I mean, this is a significant, well, travesty, really. It's such a huge tragedy what's happened in our continuing care system, and we have no one – no one – in this government as their representative standing up for seniors. They have suffered tremendously. That is why it's important to vote for the concurrence and this bill, because it is so important to seniors in our province.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I guess I want to just address that each time that I have brought this up in the House, certainly whether it was, you know, the Minister of Seniors and Housing or perhaps the Minister of Health who responded to my concerns about seniors needing an advocate, they would always assure me: yes, indeed, there is an advocate; it's just one and the same as the Health Advocate. However, in estimates this year when I asked the Minister of Seniors and Housing about her meetings with the Seniors Advocate, the lack of information in her annual report sounded like how the advocate is actually supporting the work – of course, as the previous minister I met with her regularly. She was a strong advocate, Dr. Sheree Kwong See. She was an expert in seniors' issues. She was a professor at the University of Alberta, had done research for 30 years in this area, and she certainly educated me and challenged me and challenged the Ministry of Seniors and Housing to really think differently and support seniors in a better way. I was very grateful for her input.

It's quite disturbing that, you know, this UCP government, as I said, terminated that expert and person who had a lot to offer in this area and instead folded in the Seniors Advocate with the Health Advocate and then appointed the executive director of the UCP to be in that role, someone who doesn't have any expertise in the area of seniors, certainly someone who is blatantly partisan. It's not at all about seniors.

You know, the Health Advocate also has a limited mandate. It's supposed to deal with health, but only about a third of the issues that came through the door of the stand-alone office of the Seniors Advocate had to do with health. There are, like, two-thirds of the issues regarding social isolation, transportation, financial issues, all

of these things and more, that are not being dealt with by the advocate, which were dealt with, obviously, previously, when we had the stand-alone office with someone who was very skilled and educated in this area.

Anyway, I got away from my point about estimates. When I asked the Minister of Seniors and Housing, she had assured me that, you know, absolutely, the Health Advocate and the Seniors Advocate are one and the same and they're supported. I asked her about: "There's hardly anything in the annual report about seniors' issues. How often do you meet with her? What are your discussions about?" and those kinds of things. Instead of responding, the members of the UCP caucus in that committee called a point of order. They said that I was out of order, that I couldn't ask about the Seniors Advocate in estimates because, oh, that's now in Health, so you have to talk to Health about that, which made no sense to me because I had been assured so many times by the minister in this very House that, of course, we have a champion, that we have a Seniors Advocate. Yet she would not speak at all about how she's being educated by the advocate, about what kind of work the advocate is doing, none of that. That was extremely confusing to me, and it sort of seemed to fly in the face of what she had shared with me previously.

Then in the Health estimates, of course, I was asking the Minister of Health, you know, those same kinds of questions: Seniors and Housing isn't answering these questions, so can you speak about it? Again, sadly, there was no response. There was no . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise enthusiastically this afternoon to add my comments around the concurrence debate for Bill 215, Seniors Advocate Act. I say "enthusiastically" because I have a duty. I have a duty to make sure that the voices of the seniors of Edmonton-Decore and, quite frankly, the voices of the seniors across 86 other ridings are heard loudly and clearly within this Chamber. When the UCP became government, they took away one of those voices, a voice that's able to speak loudly and clearly on their behalf.

Now, of course, we've heard the argument that that position has now moved into the Ministry of Health and that there's a Health Advocate working on behalf of seniors. I cannot make it clear enough that when you're an advocate for seniors, it's not just about health. It's about the quality of life that we're responsible for – I'll use that word again – that we're responsible to provide for the people that built this province that we all enjoy right now, and to take that voice away is staggering.

As my friend from Edmonton-Riverview had mentioned, I also sit on the private members' committee, that had the chance to review this bill. You know, as we saw earlier in the concurrence debate on 215, the committee recommended to the House that the bill proceed, but one of the things that I think is necessary that I point out about Bill 215 is one of the steps that was rushed through and blown over, and that was the ability of the committee to invite stakeholders. Now, who do you think would be the number one stakeholder on a bill such as this, the Seniors Advocate Act? Seniors themselves.

4:50

I'm sure it wouldn't have taken me very many phone calls to go and talk to a few seniors to ask them to come to the committee virtually and provide some feedback on why it would be so necessary to have a specific, independent Seniors Advocate,

someone that would be able to hold not only government but the service providers as well to account.

You know, as my friend from Edmonton-Riverview had mentioned, every day I can't help but think about the over 1,250 seniors that we have lost across this province and their families. That sense of loss I can't even begin to imagine. In my time in this Legislature, with all the seniors that I've had, quite honestly, the joy to be able to speak to over the years, with the insights that they can provide, the stories, the suggestions: it's a gold mine of information that we as an Assembly could use to make their lives better. But what we've clearly seen over the last little while is that the government doesn't want to hear them, because we fully had the opportunity to do that in that private members' committee.

I know that the committee itself has been under a time constraint to try to get business through there. I mean, eight sitting days, and of course just recently now that has changed to 12. Great. We've added a whole extra four sitting days. Of course, I would argue, Madam Speaker, that that's just not enough time, especially given a topic about the quality of life of the seniors of Alberta. It almost shouldn't even be a discussion about wanting to provide a level of comfort and of living to seniors, that built our province. They were there helping us, providing a quality of life for all of us when we were younger. Why is that even a question? We know that a Seniors Advocate works for seniors, period. To try and save time, Madam Speaker, I'm not even going to go into the partisan appointment that was clearly made with this Health Advocate.

As some of my colleagues had suggested, I mean, it's not hard for me to start looking at, because of the way the private members' committee was structured and how fast we have to get private members' bills – and let's be honest. They're backing up on the Order Paper right now. I am very, very convinced that likely Bill 215 will not get the opportunity to see full debate in this House through all the different stages that it can go through, which provides us with only this opportunity on which to make a few points on why this needs to continue.

I can't believe some of the comments that I did hear while we reviewed this bill and how it seems to be framed to be only about internal charts for bureaucracy. How unbelievably disrespectful to the very people that, as I said, built this province that we all enjoy. Unbelievably disrespectful. The Seniors Advocate is supposed to be able to speak out when things are not being done to raise that quality of life for seniors, and our current Health Advocate has been quiet. As a matter of fact, I think the crickets have been louder.

We've certainly seen instances, as my friend from Edmonton-Riverview had mentioned, where, quite honestly, seniors have been abandoned. I'm just going to say it: they have been abandoned. I'm sure that nobody in this House would say that that should happen. But somehow, if we could get to Bill 215, be able to fully debate the merits of why the Seniors Advocate is so important, despite the fact that we've cut out the number one most important stakeholder that's involved in this, the seniors of Alberta, we at the very least should be willing to put in an independent person that can speak out against the government. And we've certainly seen a lot of that in the last couple of weeks, to say the least. When they're doing it wrong, that person is able to hold the government to account. When a service provider is doing it wrong, they hold the service provider to account, and we as elected officials are able to make decisions on that to improve the quality of life of the seniors of Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope and I suspect – I'd never presuppose – that members will vote in favour of concurrence. If you do truly believe that consultation has taken place, then you

should have no doubts in your mind that having a Seniors Advocate in place is the right thing to do. It's the respectful thing to do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the report for concurrence, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood caught my eye. She has approximately two minutes.

Member Irwin: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have very little time, as those folks watching at home know, but I first just want to thank my fantastic colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, who's been an incredible advocate for seniors. You know, she's right. It's truly shameful that we've not seen the clear support from this government, that has upon multiple occasions talked a big game about supporting seniors, yet their actions prove otherwise. It has been noted. I mean, we are at a place where seniors have been so dramatically impacted by this pandemic. We've lost a lot of, you know, amazing Albertans who were seniors throughout this pandemic, and I think COVID has really shown – I've said this many times in this House. COVID has highlighted so many of the gaps in our system, and one of those significant gaps is seniors in continuing care and long-term care.

We need to do better for seniors. We need to do better for the people who built this province of ours. I think one of the least, you know, one of the smallest, most minor things we can do is support this piece of legislation and support an independent Seniors Advocate. It's something that seniors have been asking for. It's something that, through consultation, my colleague knows is very much needed. I'll urge all the members in this House to support . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allotted for debate on this matter has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion 518 is before the Assembly this evening. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen. I'm just confirming that he has not yet previously spoken. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Amendments to Standing Orders

518. Mr. Williams moved:

Be it resolved that

A. the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective February 25, 2021, be amended

(a) in Standing Order 29 by striking out suborder (2), and

(b) by adding the following after Standing Order 29:
Intervention
29.1(1) A Member may, in accordance with this Standing Order, intervene during another Member's speech on any item of debate referred to in Standing Order 29(1) except if the speech is one of the following:

- (a) a Member's opening or closing speech in respect of moving a resolution or a Bill;
- (b) a Member's speech immediately following an opening speech referred to in clause (a);
- (c) a Member's speech on a motion for an address in reply to the Lieutenant Governor's speech.

(2) A Member may request to intervene during another Member's speech by rising while that Member is speaking.

(3) If a Member requests to intervene, the Member who is speaking may, immediately on the other Member rising

- (a) agree to the request by
 - (i) acknowledging the Member's request,
 - (ii) stating that they agree to the request, and
 - (iii) taking their seat, or
- (b) refuse the request by continuing with their speech.

(4) If a Member agrees to a request to intervene

- (a) the Member's speaking time is immediately suspended until the intervention concludes,
- (b) the Member who intervenes
 - (i) is limited to a speaking time of one minute, and
 - (ii) may only ask questions or make comments on matters relevant to the speech on which they have intervened,
- (c) no Member, including the Member whose speech is the subject of the intervention, may request to intervene during the intervention, and
- (d) on conclusion of the intervention, the Member whose speech was the subject of the intervention may resume speaking for the remainder of their speaking time.

(5) If a Member refuses a request to intervene

- (a) the Member may continue speaking for the remainder of their speaking time, and
- (b) the Member who made the request must immediately take their seat.

(6) A Member may not agree to more than five interventions during their speech.

(7) For greater certainty, a Member may make multiple requests to intervene in another Member's speech.

(8) Despite any other suborder under this Standing Order, the Speaker may direct any Member as is necessary to preserve order and decorum during a debate.

B. the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

- (a) conduct a review of the amendments set out in Part A within one year of the day on which these amendments come into force, and
- (b) table a report in the Assembly on that review, which may include any amendments recommended by the committee, within 365 days of the day on which the standing committee commences its review.

C. the amendments set out in Part A come into force on passage of this motion.

[Debate adjourned April 19: Ms Goodridge speaking]

Mr. Dang: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 518, that my hon. colleague from Peace River has proposed. I think that certainly there are a number of concerns that I have with this motion that I would like to see addressed before we move forward. As such, I'd like to introduce an amendment at this time.

The Speaker: Thank you. If you would just wait until I get a copy, then you can proceed, hon. member.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1. I might just provide comment. We often in private members' business, with respect to amending motions – now, I appreciate that it certainly would appear that this doesn't turn the motion into the negative. We have often – and I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford will remember that he, too, had the opportunity to speak to whether or not a motion would be acceptable to the mover as members only perhaps once in a Legislature or even less have the opportunity to move a motion. I'll provide the hon. Member for Edmonton-South the opportunity to continue his remarks, and when the hon. Member for Peace River has had the opportunity to review that, I'll give him the opportunity as to whether or not we'll proceed.

The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is, of course, that we have tried to work to retain the intent of the original motion. Certainly, I'll give a brief overview of the proposed changes. I'm happy to hear from the hon. member as well.

The overview of the motion. One of the primary changes would be that we wouldn't bring this into force now. Instead, we'd bring these changes in at the start of the fall 2021 sitting. I think that this is a prudent change as we are currently dealing with some significant changes to the standing orders already in terms of allowing things like the temporary virtual voting measures, and there is quite a considerable amount of technical expertise required for this as it stands. I think that certainly to ensure a smooth transition of this Chamber in the last few weeks here, we may want to delay bringing in more substantive changes that might cause undue work for our lovely table officers here.

Certainly, further to that, we are also suggesting that the maximum number of interventions be reduced from five to three and add in what we consider to be an injury time or an additional two minutes of speaking time if a member accepts two or more interventions. This is something that would be consistent with what exists in the United Kingdom, where it ensures that the total speaking time for members remains 20 minutes. Mr. Speaker, of course, we know that currently in the rules we have Standing Order 29(2)(a), which allows for the combination of 15 minutes allocated to the member's speech and a five-minute question or comment period. This would retain that. It would not change the total amount of time members would have to speak. I think that it's an acceptable hybrid between the systems.

I think that certainly this is something that I hope all members can vote in favour of. I think it's something that I hope the hon. member will find is necessarily similar to his motion, in keeping with the intent of his motion and would allow us to have a process that, while allowing fulsome debate in this Assembly, also comes into force in a way that is most seamless for our process. Certainly, as – fingers crossed, knock on wood here, Mr. Speaker – we come into the dying days of the pandemic, we would like to see the amendments sort of move into force in a way that would align with when some of these temporary standing orders we're currently using as well expire.

I think that certainly this is an amendment that would allow us to have a new system of debate, right? It's something that we have not done here, of course, in Alberta, this intervention system. I have reviewed some of the *Hansard* as well as the video footage of other jurisdictions that do have the intervention system, and I have taken some time to review what that process may look like. Of course, no two Chambers and no two parliaments are identical, but it does appear that it would be a considerable amount of work to implement these changes. As you know, Mr. Speaker, when we implemented

our temporary voting measures here in the Assembly, we had a considerable amount of training provided to members and practice time provided to staff to ensure that the temporary standing orders would be implemented smoothly and would be able to operate in this place while keeping with our traditions and our practices here.

I think that if we were to bring this in, we may consider having to address some of these ongoing concerns such as how an intervention may be recognized or how we would determine, if there were multiple people on an intervention, who would receive the intervention and who would give the intervention or if a member legitimately could not see another member for intervention, how those types of issues may be dealt with. I think that giving us a few months after the summer break here, Mr. Speaker, would allow us to consider those ramifications and consider the implementation here in Alberta as I want to make sure that if we bring in tools to further debate in this place, if we bring in changes that are intended to improve the quality of debate in Alberta, then I think certainly we want to give the most possible opportunity and latitude to allow your office as well as the table to have this process work in a fulsome manner.

I'd encourage all members to pass this amendment. I understand that we did work with the hon. member to try and ensure that this motion would fit his intention, and I think that – certainly, we hope that the government members would also be willing to support this amendment as I believe it is a better form of this motion. I believe that it allows us to have a better debate.

It allows us to guarantee – and I know that one of the concerns that members have raised in the past and, certainly, even Speakers have raised in the past, Mr. Speaker, is that 29(2)(a) did not allow satisfactory reply time after questions had been raised, right? Oftentimes members would rise in this place and use five minutes to give quite extensive commentary and raise quite extensive questions for the member who had previously spoken, and then that member, as the five minutes had elapsed, would have no opportunity to reply to those comments or to debate on the merits of those comments. I know that's something that's been raised in this place many times in the past.

I think that bringing in this type of injury time, bringing in this type of additional two minutes after the introductions have been granted would allow us to alleviate this, would allow us to address some of these concerns. I think it really does make sense in terms of: that is how we see it in other jurisdictions as well, right? Of course, as I mentioned, that's how they do it in the United Kingdom, with this injury time.

I think that the impact on members' ability to have a thorough conversation on the issues is going to be positive overall if we are able to bring this amendment to the motion in. Mr. Speaker, I urge very strongly all members to vote in favour of this amendment. I think that when we look at the few remaining weeks here, I don't want to throw us into any sort of difficulty with the current implementation timeline. That's why I do think it is important that we move forward with delaying these changes.

But if it is the will of the Assembly to have these changes, if it is indeed the will of the Assembly to have these changes and the Assembly does believe that these changes will improve the quality of debate in this place, then I think we do need to take into consideration that we are under, currently, extraordinary circumstances. Of course, I would never try to refer to the presence or absence of members in this place, Mr. Speaker, but I think that all members would agree that we are currently operating in a system of debate which has never been seen in Alberta and probably not in the majority of jurisdictions, and we have, certainly, many more monitors in this place than I ever imagined we would.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, when we have these types of difficulties in front of us already and we are facing these challenges not just as an Assembly but as a province, I think that taking the time to ensure that we have the technical support to implement the standing order changes and taking the time to ensure that we have the proper mechanisms in place to have these standing order changes and understand how these standing order changes might work – and that may involve, such as we did for the former temporary standing orders, additional training sessions. That may involve trial runs, as it were, or dry runs of the system because it may not be immediately clear to members how to do this change, right? Of course, I've had the opportunity to review the video footage, but not every member at this time has, I'm sure. We would have the opportunity to have that over the summer – right? – as we come back in the future.

Mr. Speaker, again, I think that this is a common-sense change for the most part. I think that it makes relatively minor modifications to the original motion. I think that it makes relatively minor modifications that simply make sense, that simply allow us to move forward in a more collaborative manner, that simply allow us to address concerns that have been raised in this place. I know this is something that former Speakers have raised, and I'm pleased to move it.

The Speaker: At the risk of engaging in debate, I couldn't help but think that I hope that no politician would fake an injury like they do in soccer to get more injury time.

The hon. Member for Peace River would like to provide a comment.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I proceed?

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Williams: Your engagement is always welcome, and I appreciate it. I wanted to thank the deputy House leader, the Member for Edmonton-South for bringing forward this amendment to my motion because I believe it makes a better motion, Mr. Speaker, and of course I accept it collaboratively in the spirit in which it was presented.

I think often of a phrase that my dad used to tell me when I was a child. He said: I can't hear what you're saying; your actions are speaking too loudly. Obviously, the intention is: speak with your actions. I come from a very rural community. They tell me also to put my money where my mouth is. As politicians, yeah, we have a duty to make sure we fulfill what we say we'll do in this Chamber as elected officials. It's unique. What we say matters in and of itself. We are men and women of words. How we say what we say is important. That's why apologies, like we're talking about when it comes to the recent situation in Kamloops, are so important for those community members, because the words we use matter.

This Chamber should be the place where we have a very important debate. If nowhere else in Alberta, we should have it here. I'm going to quote my colleague from Cardston-Siksika, from his speech earlier in this debate where he was paraphrasing the author Yuval Levin. "Put plainly, this body should be addressing our province's biggest problems, shepherding our provincial debate through those problems, and producing solutions for everyday Albertans." Mr. Speaker, those solutions come in the form of debate, which manifests in legislation passed in votes.

We care so much about a free debate that there are certain civil laws that don't apply inside this Chamber. You have immunity because of your privilege as a member when it comes to speaking in this Chamber. Contrary to what some of my libertarian friends

might assume, that doesn't mean that we have a free debate because we don't have rules that apply. We have very particular rules that apply to our debate. We want to make sure that no one is afraid of speaking their mind on behalf of their constituents on important, big issues that matter to all Albertans, that carry the force of law behind them.

But we do have limitations. Mr. Speaker, our standing orders set this out very clearly. We're prohibited from engaging in attacks against the character of others, imputing motive to another member, in some way causing disruption to the debate. The business of this Chamber being done effectively and freely truly matters to Albertans. If it didn't, we shouldn't be here. It wouldn't matter. Let's go home.

But I think all of us, on some level, no matter our political allegiances, come here with an assumption that this is the place to have that discussion. I know that the members opposite take their duties very seriously. We saw that vigorous debate earlier in private members' time today. We will continue to see it on all sides. As governments change, as time passes, this Chamber, this place, should be where that conversation is had.

These rules that we have matter, and it's important that we have the rules for a purpose, for an end, to have good debate, because that good debate should – and I think, for example, of the acceptance of this amendment – and does produce better legislation and better motions for us as a Chamber. That's why I think it's so important for us to say that how we govern ourselves in this Chamber in our standing orders should be reflected upon.

In the United Kingdom, as members opposite, including the Member for Edmonton-South, mentioned earlier, they do have this idea of interventions with injury time that gets added onto it. It hasn't always been the case that it worked that way, Mr. Speaker. I'm reading a book by a lovely pair of authors, Ayesha Hazarika and Tom Hamilton, from the United Kingdom about the history of Prime Minister's question period. Previously the Prime Minister's question period, PMQs, used to look a lot like what we had here for our question period, and it wasn't that long ago in the history of Parliament that these things changed. It was over a series of standing order changes and conventions from the mid-60s until it would have been the early 2000s that they changed into the Prime Minister's question periods that they have today.

It wasn't all at once, Mr. Speaker. As a good conservative I don't believe in a revolution, a total change all at once, but I also think it's important for us to agree that change can and should happen in the right ways. I think this motion and the amendment are an attempt to have our own incremental change and say: let's see if we can better, ameliorate, the debate within our Chamber, ameliorate the way Albertans have us engaged on the issues that matter to them to produce a better outcome.

I'm an idealist and I'm a romantic when it comes to this. I believe that debate matters. I believe in the mystery and the mysticism around this Chamber. I believe there's something about this, going back 800 years or more, about how we've developed our system of democracy, and its heart, the beating heart, is the Parliament and the Legislature and the jurisdiction. That's where it all comes together. That's its origin. That's where the sovereignty lies for us to write these laws that govern people, with incredible amounts of force behind it. We saw that under COVID, that many of the rules that we pass are impactful and meaningful to everyday Albertans. We should have debate on these issues here if nowhere else, because here is where they're being passed. Here is where we get the authority to do these things.

I think it is very important for us to be able to have good cross-examination and investigation into what a member is saying. Particularly, Mr. Speaker, I think it's even more relevant for

members of the opposition, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, to be able to bring these questions to the government. I think that is immediately the group that most benefits, but ultimately I think that Alberta benefits from a better debate.

I believe this motion achieves some of that in its own small way. I don't think it necessarily will fix all problems, and I could be wrong that we need to find a different set of standing orders to increase debate in the House for a better result for the Albertans who sent us here – I'm fine with that, too – but I'd suggest that we do take after our colleagues in the United Kingdom and start on this journey of slow, incremental change to find the system that works best, to find a natural evolution of our standing orders, towards an end, a shared end, of a debate and a Legislature that we can be proud of from all sides of this House, so that when Albertans come, when COVID is over and the galleries are open and full again, as I know they will be, they can come and not be embarrassed by the quality of debate but instead say: "Thank you for asking that question" or "You know what? I hadn't thought of that before. They put it right on the nose. They did a good job."

I think that's something that we can aspire to. I think that, by and large, Albertans expect that what goes on here is a serious business of serious individuals writing laws that govern their day-to-day lives, that govern whether or not they're going to be able to open their business in such a way or make certain plans in their lives, because our laws have an effect on them. I think that's incredibly important, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

I'm grateful that the member opposite brought forward his motion to amend, and with this amendment I think it does give, as he mentioned, our hard-working table officers the opportunity to make sure that they're well prepared for a smooth introduction of the interventions. I think it also allows this idea of injury time, which is, like the member opposite said, part of the innovation that came in the United Kingdom, on which the original Motion 518 is based. The idea is that if you're going to accept interventions, we should also allow more time, for that individual who had a prepared speech and a point to get across, for an ability to rebut those if needed. That's fine with me. I think that is in the same spirit of the motion, exactly bang on, the ability for a genuine back and forth.

Mr. Speaker, what I'm most excited about with this motion and the amendment, that I'm very happily accepting as a friendly amendment, is that it shows that there is the possibility for genuine collaboration on debate. I heard a lot of concern from members of my benches saying: "I want to make sure that we all buy in as a Chamber. I want to make sure that both sides accept interventions and are happy to rise and bring their side to the debate. I'm afraid that it might become dysfunctional. Standing Order 29(2)(a)s might not work perfectly, but they're doing something now, and they allow the chance for that rebuttal." I very seriously appreciate that position. I think it is scary to rock the boat too much. If we have something that, you know, might not be perfect but is working, why change it? I feel very comfortable, going forward, with accepting the amendment because it shows to me a willingness on both sides to have a genuine collaboration on the issue, to try and use the debate.

When we come to the standing committee, if it does the review and says, "You know what? There are parts of this that need to be fixed; there are aspects of this standing order that aren't working," there's a time, then, to change it, if needed. I'm hoping that we'll say that it works well. That, I think, in the end, Mr. Speaker, will be up to the members of this House to decide on, how they engage with the standing order. Are we going to rise to the level of political maturity that is expected by Albertans and is demonstrated in other

jurisdictions with similar standing orders? That's a question for us as individuals. I think it's important that we take it seriously, because Albertans sent us here to act like adults, to engage civilly with each other on very passionate issues of disagreement. I'm happy to say that I think that's what we'll be able to do.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to the amendment and to accept it as a friendly one from the Member for Edmonton-South and deputy House leader. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment A1, are there others wishing to speak?

If not, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are back on the main motion, Motion Other than Government Motion 518. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to rise and add a few comments around Motion 518, as presented and amended, from the Member for Peace River. I guess I have to say that I do have some reservations with regard to this motion. As I've stated before in this House, I tend to get down into the language of what something says, what it doesn't say, and, when listening to debate, how things are framed, things like that.

I guess that when I look at the way the language is framed around Motion 518 – you know, I'm always happy to be corrected if I am wrong. The interventions that it is proposing to allow don't necessarily have to be accepted by a member who's speaking. Because of that language, I potentially see this being a concern. We would give up the ability of our usual 29(2)(a) to add some comments or questions after a speaker. The individual then could decide not to accept any kind of interventions, and thus it would diminish the debate.

Again, you know, looking at the language, at what's been said about it moving forward, about what kinds of things I have seen in the past, as a member of the opposition – and I do appreciate the comments from the Member for Peace River that as opposition members we take our duties very, very seriously; I do appreciate that – I see that this potentially could be used as a way to stifle the opposition's ability to provide additional comments.

As we know, again, looking past to what's been said, the Premier had talked about, before the 2019 election, wanting to move at lightning speed with legislation and limiting the ability of people to present opposition to things. We've certainly seen a lot of standing order changes that have been made during the course of the 30th Legislature. Some of those changes I certainly haven't agreed with because I do think they're limiting the ability of opposition to do its job, which, as the member said, is a duty that I take very, very seriously. So I am concerned about this.

As was said, governments change, and roles end up getting reversed. You know, are we going to see similar arguments, going forward, if the roles would change? Again, I just find it interesting. I guess, depending on what's being debated at the moment, it seems like one minute there's a desire to be like everybody else, and then the next minute there is a desire to not be like anyone else. I have heard references to duplicating some of the procedures that have been in place in the U.K., and precedents here in Alberta have come up throughout debate. I find it very, very confusing. Yet again it's that diametrically opposing language that we keep hearing over and over again with things.

So I do have concerns around this. I will certainly be listening intently to the remaining debate around Motion 518, to what others

may think about it and how it could affect their ability to do their job in representing their constituents in their respective ridings. I'm certainly happy that the amendment passed, because I think that it does take away some of my concerns, but again we still have that section of that language that does provide for a member to be able to not accept any of those interventions, thus stifling debate around things.

5:30

I am also a little concerned around how the language might be potentially used for debate time. You know, for any person that sits in the desks of the opposition, I know that you can always go on about: well, we never get enough debate time. Members of the government side say: you get plenty of debate time. But this definitely could influence that debate time, reducing it. You know, the concern is around stifling opposition to legislation and how perhaps members of this House would then not get the time to bring forward their thoughts and their concerns or their ideas around proposed legislation and certainly what they hear from their constituents. I'm grateful that members have stepped up in this House to state their points. I certainly would never ever want them to do anything otherwise. Do I always necessarily agree with what they might say? Of course not, and I don't think that they would provide anything less to me as well.

I think as we move forward with the remainder of debate, I will be listening carefully and intently to what is said, and we'll see what kind of thoughts will move me in one way or the other around whether or not to support Motion 518 as amended.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the motion are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and add my voice to debate on the private member's Motion 518, brought forward by the Member for Peace River, standing order changes along with the amendment that this House just accepted that was brought forward by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-South.

Despite the, you know, collaborative work that we've just done – and we have improved, I certainly, sincerely feel, the private member's Motion 518 – there still are some concerns with the main private member's motion, certainly from my vantage point. I guess one of the fundamental ones, and perhaps – I know that Mr. Speaker is a lover of looking deeply into the rules of order and understanding how we function here in this place, but moving this forward as a private member's motion rather than as a government motion is a bit questionable. Is this really actually the right tool to undertake changes to the standing orders?

You know, with private members' motions we just have a bit less than an hour to debate whereas with a government motion we'd have much more time than that, so for a fundamental change in how things are done, is that a good move forward? Also, too, you know, having it referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: this would also give us a fulsome debate of any change that this bill puts forward and how it impacts the members of the Assembly. I mean, this is just something I want to bring up in debate, that perhaps this is kind of an extraordinary process, to have this come through in this manner, but indeed, it is before us today, and of course we will continue to debate it.

This change. I mean, the changes since the UCP was first elected: they have made, I'd say, a fair number of changes to the procedures here in this House, and some might take exception to it. I certainly

didn't support changes where we as members, whether we're government or opposition, are no longer allowed to stand in this House and introduce guests, you know, in the gallery. I know it's been COVID, so we haven't necessarily had guests in the gallery, but still. That's not allowed anymore. That was certainly a way that I as an elected representative could really support my stakeholders depending on what my critic area was at the time and also to honour constituents.

I find that the process that's changed now, where it's just through the Speaker introducing them, isn't as much of an opportunity to really honour them and to chat a little bit about that. I understand that it was perhaps brought forward because of wanting things to be a bit more efficient in this House, that things are taking too long and we want to move things along. But, you know, it sort of breaks my heart a little bit because it is kind of some of the sweetness and juice of the work that we do, that we can really invite people to this Chamber and have them learn a little bit about what we're doing here and to be acknowledged by us. I'm so sorry that we no longer have that opportunity, and that is another order that was changed under this government.

Changing this order in terms of 29(2)(a) and how we debate, where normally we would talk for 15 minutes with our – you know, certainly, I'm not sure what all members do to prepare for debate, but I know that I sit down and I review the legislation and I identify the key points that I want to make and I appreciate that time to be able to really dig into the legislation and to speak about it. Perhaps it does impact my constituents, so I get to talk about that. If I'm being – I'll just say interrupted. If I'm being interrupted by – now, it was five, but now it's only three according to this amendment that we've just accepted as an Assembly. I know that that'll push me off my game a bit – and perhaps it might push others off their game, too – and I won't be able to say fully what I want.

Of course, I would have 15 minutes, say, and then for five minutes, of course, someone can 29(2)(a) me, as we say here in the Chamber. Someone can ask me a question or indeed just use the rest of that time, right? Many times, certainly, government members will use that time to often challenge what has been already shared, and certainly we in the opposition do that also to government members to challenge what's been shared. So that's going to be a little bit more, I suppose, mixed up and perhaps a bit less coherent in how I see it, really. So I do have concerns with this private member's motion and the change.

This may seem trite, perhaps. Maybe that's not even fair. I shouldn't give myself a hard time here. But, I mean, one of the other standing orders that was changed was that we no longer can bang on our desks, which is a long-held tradition in this Chamber. I must say that that kind of was an outlet, and perhaps there'd be less disorder sometimes if we were allowed to do that. You know, in my caucus we want to stand in support of our colleagues and really affirm their work. When they speak, we want to cheer them on, and we can't really cheer them on, but if we could bang on our desks – that, too, has gone away.

You know, it saddens me a bit to see some of these traditions of our Chamber changed and lost and, I think, some of the vitality of us all working in this Chamber. Changing these rules is sad to me, and I think that this is going to kind of create a little bit more chaos, pulling your attention away from the arguments that you're making that, of course, are important and that we all need to be prepared to speak to every bill that comes before us.

So I feel that I won't support this motion.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, pursuant to Standing Order 8(3) the mover of the motion has five minutes to close debate.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to close debate on Motion 518 for a standing order change to allow interventions for what I believe would be more effective debate for the purpose of serving Albertans in this Chamber.

I'll just use the opportunity to respond as best I can to some of the members' opposite concerns, and I think, for the record, that they are legitimate concerns. They are not so different from concerns I heard from my own benches at times. But I will point out that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was wondering: why is it that we're doing this in a private member's motion, not government? Mr. Speaker, I am not in government. I cannot. I'm not the Government House Leader. The way it works within our caucus is that private members have private member initiatives. This is coming forward as a motion other than government motion because I happened to be drawn for a motion in that order in the lottery by the LAO. I will note that if this motion passes, it is because I have spoken to every individual member on our side in an attempt to get them to vote for this. It is not a whipped vote. I believe in this, and I've tried to convince them in the same way. It will come through a certain collaborative participation between me as a backbencher with other members of government caucus to vote for it as well.

5:40

I appreciate the concerns from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I will say that if it passes, I want to make sure that this continues on, this collaboration. The Member for Edmonton-Decore, I will tell you: you're right. There is a possibility of not accepting interventions. That is the system as it works in the U.K.

But I can tell you that on my side I will accept as many as I can from you, and I hope that you'll do the same. Maybe that's the start of what this looks like, a certain collaboration, if it goes through.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that this Chamber only works when we agree to a collaborative process. With this standing order change or not, it only works when we agree that we're here for a common purpose even if we have, you know, different ways for achieving that purpose, and that's for the good of Alberta and Albertans. I think that with that calm and united attention is where we would start with working on any of these questions.

To the members that are concerned that it went from 20 possible minutes to speak if the 29(2)(a) is referred back to you and you now have 17 minutes, three minutes, I think, are given up from your speech for a good purpose, for genuine, direct interventions that are topical to the point you are making during your debate. I implore all members, especially those in the government benches, especially those in the front bench that are responsible for executing the role of government and executive power, please accept interventions. I think it will create a better democracy and a better Chamber for Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close debate on Motion 518.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 518 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:42 p.m.]

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