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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 110

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, June 7, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 65 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise on behalf of the hon. the Minister of Health to move third reading of Bill 65, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.

Over the past weeks there has been extensive discussion about this bill in this Chamber, and I do believe that that debate has resulted in a clearer understanding of the bill's intent. I am pleased to have heard general agreement from across the aisle that these changes are relatively straightforward and are common sense. They fix, Mr. Speaker, some previous gaps in legislation and ultimately benefit working health professionals to ensure Albertans are taken care of within the health system.

Our priority remains protecting lives and livelihoods during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are doing everything we can to vaccinate people as quickly as possible, to provide support to businesses, and to ensure that the health and well-being of our residents in continuing care are always protected, but this priority work to address the impacts of the pandemic does not mean that government shouldn't also continue our work to strengthen, modernize, and improve Alberta's health legislation.

The updates and the amendments to the six pieces of legislation in Bill 65 are only part of the work being done to ensure Alberta's health system better protects, serves, and meets the needs of Albertans. Changes to make the health system more transparent with increased system efficiency and protection of public dollars, all based on feedback from our valued stakeholders, is felt by all Albertans.

The Alberta College of Pharmacy and the pharmacy profession asked specifically for changes to the Health Professions Act and the Pharmacy and Drug Act. During debate of this bill I was pleased to hear support for our proposed pharmacy-related amendments that will provide Albertans with an enhanced pharmacy system that is more accountable, more modern, and continues to operate safely. Pharmacy technicians working in the pharmacy system would also be added to this legislation to ensure their accountability to Albertans as well, Mr. Speaker.

We are also deliberately moving certain operational requirements for pharmacies from regulations to standards of practice. This will allow the pharmacy system to adjust itself to future changes and be more nimble for the needs of patients. No longer will the pharmacy college have to ask government for major legislative changes, but it can make changes directly to their standards of practice that make sense on the ground for pharmacists and for Albertans who seek pharmacy services. After all, Mr. Speaker, the pharmacy system is in the best position to outline requirements for physical facilities, dispensing areas, and private consultation rooms, for instance. Amendments will also empower the Alberta College of Pharmacy to develop strong standards of practice, including those which protect pharmacy information systems, better safeguard patient records, and outline requirements to safely store drugs and have

adequate drug supplies for patient needs. We look forward to working with the pharmacy college on these important standards.

Further amendments will boost collaboration between pharmacists or pharmacy technicians and veterinarians to enable them to provide pharmacy services, medication, and drugs to all animals, including companion animals and cattle on farms and ranches. During debate I was pleased to hear agreement that these changes will allow pharmacists to work hand in hand with veterinarians, who are often in short supply in rural areas. Our legislative changes will increase access to animal health and provide support for cattle, dairy, and the agriculture industry that, in turn, supports the food chain. We are simply aligning provincial and federal legislation to make sure that the profession has the legal authority, Mr. Speaker, to provide these important pharmacy services to support animal health, as they have in the past. We look forward to ongoing work to the pharmacists and pharmacy technician regulation to identify the specific types of pharmacy services that could be provided to animals.

I also look forward to proposed amendments to the Alberta Evidence Act that will ensure judges of fatality inquiries have facts and recommendations for quality assurance committees to help fatal inquiries hold more comprehensive reviews and make more effective recommendations.

There are several other components of this important piece of legislation that will make things better for Albertans, and I do hope, Mr. Speaker, as we proceed with third reading inside this Chamber, that this bill will continue to enjoy the support of all members of the House and that we are ultimately able to pass it in due course.

With that, I will move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Referendum on Equalization Payments

83. Mr. Kenney moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly determine, pursuant to section 3 of the Referendum Act, the following as the question to be put to electors at a referendum and to which the response from an elector who votes in that referendum must be either yes or no: should section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment to the principle of making equalization payments, be removed from the Constitution?

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move Government Motion 83.

The Speaker: Please proceed, if the hon. the Premier would like to do so.

Mr. Kenney: I would like to. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to introduce this historic motion, which will give all Albertans a direct voice on a critical issue about this province and its place in the Canadian federation. I often point out that this Assembly is the only in Canada, including the House of Commons and the Senate, which has every Canadian provincial flag and territorial flag on display. This provincial Assembly starts our proceedings once a week singing the national anthem and, of course, as well, the royal anthem. This province is proud of the role it has played as a nation builder. Albertans have made an oversized contribution to Canada from the very beginning of this province on

September 1, 1905, and prior to that as a part of the North-West Territories. This has been the greatest resource of natural resources and wealth and, I would argue, human ingenuity of any part of the Canadian federation.

That has become increasingly evident in recent decades, Mr. Speaker, as Alberta, whose economy has been driven in such a disproportionate part by our natural resources workers, has contributed over \$620 billion net to the rest of Canada since 1960. That's not an opinion; that is the result of 25 years of research by University of Calgary professor of economics emeritus Robert Mansell and his team, who were the first to develop a time-consistent data set on fiscal transfers within the federation. In the last decade alone Albertans, through their federal taxes, have contributed a net of approximately \$21 billion to the rest of the federation. It's true; an important caveat is that last year, in the midst of a twin public health and economic crisis of a once-in-a-century scale, we saw our net contribution come down significantly as our revenues crashed and federal transfers were increased massively across the country. But last year was an aberrant year. This year – I'm sure the Finance minister can confirm – we will be back to making a net fiscal contribution in the scale of \$20 billion a year.

Mr. Speaker, I hasten to add that this does not mean that the hon. Minister of Finance signs a cheque to his federal counterpart for \$20 billion. That is not a transfer from the government of Alberta voted on by this Legislature to the federal government. Rather, that is an imputed transfer that comes from the federal taxes that we all pay as Albertans. The way I explain it is that if you go to Tims and buy a cup of coffee, 5 per cent of it is added on through GST. That goes down to the federal treasury, as does your personal income tax, as do your EI premiums, as do your CPP premiums, as do federal corporate taxes. You take all of the federal taxes paid by all Alberta individuals, families, and businesses and then you subtract from that all of the benefits and transfers to persons and the province that come back from Ottawa, and the net number, the net fiscal contribution, is over \$20 billion a year, year after year after year.

7:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, sometimes in these debates we talk perhaps a little bit too much about equalization versus all the other transfers, because out of the \$21 billion that transferred, only about \$3 billion of that is attributable to our net contribution to the system of equalization. What is equalization? Well, equalization is a system that exists in most federations. It has existed in various forms in Canada since the late 1950s. It was formalized as a principle in the Constitution of Canada, section 36(2), in 1982 with the patriation of the Constitution and the concurrent adoption of the Charter of Rights. It is the principle that all provinces should maintain roughly comparable levels of public services at roughly comparable levels of taxation.

Mr. Speaker, that is a noble objective, I think, in any federation. It's an understandable objective. I don't think any of us would want to see fellow Canadians in other parts of the country living in abject poverty while other parts of the country might be in periods of spectacular prosperity. I've always said – I've always said – that I believe Albertans are proud to have been able to contribute to their fellow Canadians when times have been good here but bad elsewhere.

That's why I started my remarks by pointing to the patriotism of Albertans reflected in the symbolism of this Assembly. We are not – we are not – small-minded parochial regionalists, Mr. Speaker. We are big Canadians, we are generous Canadians, and we are made up of Canadians from coast to coast. As we've driven the prosperity of this province in the past four decades, yes, oil and gas

was a big part of it, but the biggest part of that dynamic growth, that great Canadian modern economic miracle that is Alberta, has been its people. It's true. This province, whose population has doubled in the past 40 years – it has doubled with the youngest population. Yes, we've had a higher birth rate because of that young population, but the largest share of that doubling in population has been migration, migration from across Canada, and, yes, immigration from around the world.

When I look around this House and see the spectacular Albertans who chose this place, who came from all across the world, the Member for Calgary-McCall and the Member for Edmonton-South West being two of many examples – we thank them for having chosen Alberta to help to build this province. But I also look around and I see the Minister of Children's Services, who chose to come here from Saskatchewan, the Member for Lethbridge-East, who was born and raised in British Columbia, and, well, the hon. Minister of Finance, whose dad left as a hardscrabble farmer from southern Manitoba and set out in a car 60 years ago to drive up to the new frontier west of Grande Prairie and, with his brother, start a small cattle operation that's become one of the largest ranches in Alberta. That's the Alberta story, Mr. Speaker. We don't build walls around this province. We don't build barriers. We don't resent our fellow Canadians. We welcome them, and they are the people who have helped us to build this prosperous province.

So we offer this motion in a spirit of patriotism and of friendship. The message we send is the message I delivered to fellow Canadians on the night that this government was elected in April 2019, with the largest ever democratic mandate in the history of the province, with over a million votes. I spoke as much to our fellow Canadians as to Albertans. I said that Alberta has been there for the rest of Canada through thick and through thin from year after year and decade after decade, not only through our fiscal transfers but also by being that place of opportunity. We have been that engine of social mobility for people from across the country, for the unemployed Newfoundland fishermen, who lost their fishery, lost the cod fishery, which for four centuries had been the mainstay of their economy. These are tough resource workers, small rural communities completely dependent on that responsible resource development. They lost their way of life, and where did so many of them go? To the land of hope and opportunity, to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, think of the folks in Cape Breton: hard, tough people, the descendants of the Highland clearance Scots and the potato famine Irish. The losers of history their ancestors were in many ways, and they were struggling to make a life. When the coal mines closed in Cape Breton, where did so many of them come? Here to Alberta, yes, many of them, to work in our oil and gas sector. When many of the manufacturing plants started to close in Ontario and Quebec with globalization and automation, where was the economic release valve? Well, I'll tell you what happened in the U.S. with the hollowing out of the Rust Belt industrial core of the American Midwest. What happened? Those communities went into a tail dive, a sad story of social decline, of growing criminality, of drug and opioid addiction, a sad story of social and economic decline through much of the U.S. postindustrial Rust Belt.

But, Mr. Speaker, in Canada workers from similar, small-sized factory towns in central Ontario: they had an option. That option was called Alberta, and they came out here as well and helped us to build the prosperity of this modern province.

My point to our fellow Canadians is that our contribution isn't just 20-plus billion dollars a year, \$630 billion over six decades. Our biggest contribution has been that place of opportunity where people – and we don't even account for that. Imagine the

incalculable wealth that those workers have sent back to their relatives in the form of kind of domestic remittances, Mr. Speaker.

So it is no exaggeration to say that we have been the engine of the modern Canadian economy, yet, Mr. Speaker, what brought so many – you know, when you hear folks on the left talk about the need for diversification, often for them that’s code for turning our backs on and eventually shutting down the oil and gas industry.

Here’s the point. Our economy is one-third less dependent on oil and gas today than it was 40 years ago. Why is that? We have diversified. We’ve diversified, by which I mean oil and gas has shrunk as a relative share of our gross domestic product even while oil and gas has expanded massively in absolute terms, to the point where today we’re generating the largest quantity of crude oil in our history. Take that, Greenpeace.

Mr. Speaker, here’s the point. Why did we diversify? Because of even faster growth in areas like services and construction and manufacturing. What drove those investments in those jobs? Population growth did. What drove that population growth? High-paying jobs, a red-hot labour market, the highest labour force participation rate in the country, the highest employment rates.

You know, when I hear the NDP’s general critique about modern Alberta politics and economics, it goes like this: that under 45 years of Conservative governments this province was mismanaged, we didn’t save our resources, and it’s all a terrible, dystopian wasteland. Mr. Speaker, this province for the better part of those four decades: by far the highest overall family and individual incomes, by far the highest disposable after-tax incomes, by far the highest levels of employment, the lowest levels of unemployment, the lowest levels of poverty, the lowest levels of homelessness, and with all of that wealth we were able to afford the most generous government services in the land.

Here’s my point. It’s that the energy sector, through the miracle of its modern development and the wealth it created, the opportunity economy it created, all of the spinoff effects – I mean, just think about this. Think about the decline of so many rural communities. I mentioned this in Newfoundland. I grew up in a little farm town in Saskatchewan that had a population of 800 before the Depression, and it now has a population of maybe 230. There are basically no businesses left. That was the story of so many rural communities but not in Alberta, where oil and gas came in, hired people. Farmers could get a second income. Maybe they could get some leasehold revenue as well. The life of rural Alberta: far more vital than in most parts of rural Canada, again, because of that industry. That industry, that resource, has created so much wealth, opportunity, jobs, and, yes, transfers to the rest of the country.

7:50

Mr. Speaker, let’s bring that story forward to circa 2015, about the time that the party opposite took office here in Alberta and Mr. Trudeau took office in Ottawa. We had gone through this huge modern development of our resource sector initially, you know, in the ’60s and ’70s, conventional, and then it must be granted that as a result partly of strategic investments made by the government of the late Peter Lougheed together with the incredible culture of innovation and enterprise of science, of research and development, science and technology, we managed to take what was considered an unproductive resource of the Canadian oil sands and turn it into the third-largest reserve of proven, probable, and accessible oil reserves on the face of the planet. That didn’t happen by accident.

I was once in a debate on television with Elizabeth May, the former leader of the Green Party, and I was talking about the huge contribution of the oil and gas sector to Canadian prosperity, and she said: well, all you people out there do is that you just stick a hole in the ground and suck out the oil. It reminded me of when

Justin Trudeau at the Davos summit, his favourite, you know, fancy international billionaire party, said, quote: “My predecessor,” meaning Stephen Harper, “wanted you to know Canada for its resources, but I want you to know Canada for its resourcefulness.” Unquote.

Mr. Speaker, for the record there is no industry in Canada more resourceful, with more intensive investments in hard science, in applied research, development, and technology than the Alberta oil and gas sector, which turned a huge and dormant resource of the Canadian oil sands into the third-largest energy source on Earth.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that resource developed, billions of dollars of investments were made, and there was a time not that long ago when we had pretty broad crosspartisan consensus, we’ll at least say bipartisan consensus. The NDP was never part of it. But there was a consensus where Liberal and Conservative governments and parties federally and provincially understood the importance of responsible resource development.

I must salute former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, of whom I was an adversary. I want to particularly salute his former Deputy Prime Minister, Anne McLellan, and many in their cabinet, my friend the now high commissioner to London, Ralph Goodale, and others, because, Mr. Speaker, between 1993 and 2003, really in that decade, they approved enormous new oil sands developments because they saw that this was our calling as a country, to responsibly develop our resources, to pay for the kinds of social programs the New Democrats talk about.

That realistic, balanced, mainstream Liberal government got it, Mr. Speaker. They were pro oil and gas, and they were pro energy infrastructure, not without limits. They wanted environmental responsibility, and they articulated that policy balance, I think, in a very sound way.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we got up to levels of production where it became increasingly evident that we needed energy infrastructure to get our products to market so that we didn’t end up bottlenecking the oil sands. Where we’re at is that we’re now producing about 4 million barrels a day of crude oil, and we are getting back up to maximum capacity to ship it out. We hope that later this year, the fourth quarter, we will see the commission of the Enbridge line 3 replacement project, that will add 380,000 barrels a day of egress. We are pleased to see the Trans Mountain expansion apparently on schedule, which would be an additional half a million barrels a day of egress.

But, Mr. Speaker, we got to this key inflection point in our modern economic history a few years ago where we needed to start building pipelines. We needed that energy infrastructure. Then, regrettably, we had two governments, one here in Edmonton and one in Ottawa, who suddenly took a radical change of course in the direction of Canadian resource and economic policy. They decided that they were going to allow their left, green ideology to trump the economic interests of working women and men in this province. They decided that they were going to subordinate the ability of working women and men to put food on the table for their families to their ideological, pie-in-the-sky dreams. That’s exactly what happened. We had a Premier, the now Leader of the Opposition, who went down there to Ottawa and said to Prime Minister Trudeau: please kill the approved Northern Gateway pipeline. Mr. Speaker, I hope she never lives it down. She went down there. They had New Democrats who went to Washington, DC, and said to Congress: please kill the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. The first instructions that then Alberta senior representative to the United States Rob Merrifield received from the then Premier in 2015 were, quote, down tools on promoting the Keystone XL pipeline.

Then, of course, they brought in their carbon taxes here and in Ottawa to punish normal people for living ordinary lives, for

heating their homes and filling up their gas tanks, buying their groceries. Then they took that, after their punitive tax, in order to finance their ridiculous green schemes like low-flow shower heads and, really, perhaps the most bizarre thing: they started handing out hundreds of millions of dollars of subsidies to millionaire owners of renewable energy companies in wind and solar. We took away every dime of those subsidies, Mr. Speaker, and guess what happened? A huge expansion of investment in renewable energy in Alberta based on the market principles, not on punitive taxes and socialist central planning.

Mr. Speaker, Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law, which is a direct violation of our exclusive constitutional jurisdiction under section 92A of the Constitution, that critical historic victory fought for and won by Premier Lougheed, which declares that provincial legislatures have exclusive authority over the production and regulation of their natural resources, including oil and gas and forestry resources, quote, unquote. Bill C-69, the so-called federal environmental assessment act – what I call the no-more-pipelines law – is a direct, full-frontal violation of that principle, which is why we are suing the federal government, as promised, through a judicial reference to the Alberta appeal court.

That legislation created even more uncertainty. Enbridge spends \$1.6 billion on Northern Gateway, gets National Energy Board approval, gets federal cabinet approval, lines up massive First Nations support, and then Justin Trudeau by political fiat, with the full, enthusiastic support of Alberta's NDP, just shuts it down: force majeure, destruction of wealth, destabilization of investor confidence that sent a shock wave.

And then President Obama, at the behest of the NDP, shuts down the Keystone XL project for the first time – and that's after TC Energy had spent over a billion dollars on the project up to 2015 – and not a peep from Prime Minister Trudeau. Of course, all that decision got was applause from Alberta's NDP government because they've always been opposed to pipelines.

Then, Mr. Speaker, Energy East. TC Energy spent \$800 million in several years. I remember. I was at one of the very first briefings about Energy East when I was a minister in Mr. Harper's government, and I thought: what a great, bold idea; this is so exciting. A nation-building idea to take our energy, first of all do the line 9 reversal, and then build additional infrastructure that'll take Alberta energy to the east coast, displace Saudi and Algerian and even American oil imports. Wow. This is fantastic. This is great economics. It's great for jobs; it's great for national unity. And, of course, Justin Trudeau killed it.

Yeah. How did he do it, Mr. Speaker? He did a kind of – it was a little bit clever and indirect, but his government instructed the National Energy Board to apply a completely bizarre, novel, unprecedented policy test, which was to assess that project, for the first time of any pipeline, for the up- and downstream emissions notionally associated with the pipeline, which, as I've always said, makes no sense. A pipeline consumes barely any energy, produces barely any emissions. It's an inert piece of pipe. It requires some energy to drive the pumps, but it is not a major energy consumer.

8:00

Mr. Speaker, the consumption from the Energy East pipeline would have been largely drivers in New England and none of the business of the federal government to regulate. They don't regulate the downstream consumption of oil that is brought into the Irving refinery on Pemex tankers carrying Saudi and Qatari oil. They don't measure that. They're not discounted. There's no carbon tax assessed on them. They don't need approval from the National Energy Board, from the Trudeau government to bring in foreign oil. Why would Canadian exports be punished? What's this about?

Mr. Speaker, then the more outrageous thing, that the NDP refused – refused – to stand up to, was the National Energy Board test that killed Energy East on the assessment of emissions associated with the upstream production of the energy that would be shipped through the pipeline. Now, what the heck does that mean? I mean, where was the federal government regulating the emissions associated with producing cars in southern Ontario or airplanes in Montreal? Everything requires some energy production, including the production of energy. Why would only one industry be regulated negatively on that basis? It made no sense. But, as a result, TC Energy pulled out. They pulled the plug. They said: we can't possibly proceed and risk shareholders' money with this ever-changing and bizarre, unmeasurable metric that has been applied to us. So we lost Northern Gateway, we lost Keystone XL round 1, and we lost Energy East.

Then, of course, we had at the time the New Democrats in B.C. using games of political obstruction on the Trans Mountain project, and I called on the federal government at the time: if you really believe in the federation, then trigger the section of the Constitution that allows you and has since 1867 to declare certain projects as being in the national interest, and if a certain province violates that national interest clause, then impose sanctions. Make the federation mean something. This comes back to what I said earlier about Albertans being big Canadians. We never have and we never would unilaterally violate free trade within the federation, Mr. Speaker, unless we're backed into a corner to defend our interests. In this instance, the federal government didn't lift a finger, nor did the NDP government suggest that they do so to sanction B.C. for threatening the interruption of interprovincial infrastructure, which is protected under the Constitution's national interest clause.

What was the consequence of all that? Kinder Morgan, a global pipeline company, packs up and leaves Canada. They said: we're out of here. They said, basically: what a gong show when it comes to investor confidence and regulatory certainty; we are out of here. The federal government ultimately had to go in, at great risk to taxpayers, and buy that project.

And then there was Bill C-48, the tanker ban, totally prejudicial. For the first time in Canadian history only one product, bitumen, produced in only one province, Alberta, was excluded for export, a complete violation of the principles of free trade and coastal access off the northwest coast of British Columbia, another full-frontal, direct attack on this province's largest industry. I could go on and on about policy after policy, and they continue to layer them on, Mr. Speaker. Half the time our cabinet meets, what are we talking about? It's the latest federal threat to the resources of this province and how we're going to deal with it.

That is why, in the lead-up to the 2019 provincial election, we proposed a fight-back strategy for Alberta, one key element of which is the motion I tabled this evening. In that platform we committed to hold a referendum on the principle of equalization in the Canadian Constitution concurrent with the 2021 municipal election this upcoming October. Let me explain why, what the logic is here, because I always make this very clear: should this motion pass, Mr. Speaker, it will not result in a direct or immediate change to section 36 of the Constitution nor to the equalization formula, because no one province can change a multilateral aspect of the Constitution unilaterally.

Now, let me maybe make a bit of an aside here. Members will note that Quebec has Bill 76 before l'Assemblée nationale right now, which does make some unilateral amendments to the Constitution of Canada with respect to powers exercised exclusively by the Quebec National Assembly on language, et cetera. But, Mr. Speaker, I wish that – now, I have embraced that, by the way. The government of Alberta has endorsed Quebec's

approach, and we are looking at areas of the Constitution which we could subject to unilateral amendment. Unfortunately, this is not one of them. This is a principle that is of general application across the federation – I see the Minister of Justice nodding – therefore not subject to any unilateral amendment formula.

Now, having said that, Mr. Speaker, the logic here – credit where it's due, it was University of Calgary political science professor emeritus and former Alberta Finance minister Ted Morton who first proposed this idea in a paper about four years ago. The concept is simply this, that in 1998 the Supreme Court of Canada, in the Quebec secession reference – that was a series of questions asked of the Supreme Court by the Chrétien government to provide, quote, clarity on the parameters for any future referendum on secession. The Supreme Court came back and – I'll summarize this in plain English – they said that if a province holds a referendum on a constitutional amendment with a clear question and a clear majority votes in favour, then the government of Canada has a, quote, binding obligation to negotiate that amendment in good faith with that province.

Now, it's true that that reference, that decision, was in the particular context of prospective Quebec secession, but we maintain that it is of general application across the federation. There'd better not be a two-tiered federation, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the right of citizens to initiate constitutional referenda.

Here's the theory, the strategy behind this motion: it is recognizing that we can't change equalization unilaterally, but it is an effort to elevate to the top of the national agenda our demand for fairness. How does all this come together? Like I say, I don't actually think Albertans object to the principle of equalization. What they object to is being forced to contribute massively to the rest of Canada even during tough times here, even while other governments are doing virtually everything they can to impair our ability to develop the wealth that we share with the rest of the country. The point of this referendum: this is an opportunity for Albertans to say in friendship to our fellow Canadians, "We want to continue to share some of our prosperity with the rest of the country, but you have to allow us to be prosperous in order to do it; you have to unshackle us from these unreasonable attacks against our prosperity and our largest industry."

It has to be a two-way street in the federation. We are not subordinate; we are coequal powers with our own spheres of sovereignty under the Constitution, Mr. Speaker. That is how a federation operates. That was very clear at the time of patriation. The adoption of this motion through a referendum would be a historic assertion of that principle by millions of Alberta voters. It doesn't mean that we change the Constitution unilaterally or equalization. What it means is that we say to Ottawa: you darn well better take us seriously because the people of Alberta have initiated the process for constitutional amendment.

Now, as I said, Mr. Speaker, equalization itself represents only – I say "only" – about \$3 billion out of the \$21 billion in net transfers, so we're talking only about 15 per cent of the overall net transfers. We have to address the other aspects of unfair transfers. You know, unemployment insurance has been a – I was the federal minister responsible for that program for a couple of years. What a headache. It has been designed, jerry-built over decades to massively favour certain regions. This is no secret. Basically, Alberta taxpayers – the last study I saw had the average Alberta worker putting a buck 80 into EI for every dollar that our workers get back out of it, so that represents a huge out-transfer.

8:10

Canada pension plan premiums: well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very substantial net transfer, and we'll have more to say about that in the

future. But let me just say that, well, based on some studies which I think actually understate the case, the net contribution of Alberta taxpayers to the rest of the country through the CPP premiums is about \$3 billion a year. There's good reason to believe it might be substantially more than that. Stayed tuned. Why does that happen? Because we have a younger population; we have a higher labour force participation rate, so a larger share of our population has been working, versus the rest of the country; more younger workers, and they're making more money, so they're paying more of the max CPP rate. You know, just add that up year after year after year for 40 and 50 years. That means that, basically, the actuarial health of the CPP has become massively dependent on the Alberta workforce. That is one.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we can't unilaterally get out of equalization, but Quebec has established a precedent for provinces operating their own provincial pension plans. That is something that the Fair Deal Panel recommended that we pursue, and I look forward to speaking to that in the future.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are so many other transfers. Look, I'll give you another example. Even though we have the largest private-sector investment relatively in research and development, science, and technology in Alberta, we get the lowest federal transfers for research grants from the federal research granting agencies. I mean, I could go on, but when you add it all up, it's \$21 billion a year.

I wish there was some simple or easy way. There are people out there who like to wind up Albertans' emotions by pretending there's some simple or easy way of fixing this fundamental unfairness. There is no simple way. This is going to take strategic smarts, dogged determination, and a lot of patience by Albertans to demand fairness. How do I define fairness? Well, again, I simply define fairness as having the ability to develop the wealth that we share with the rest of the country. To be clear, I do not oppose equalization. The vast majority of Albertans do not oppose sharing. What they oppose is being forced to share at unreasonably high levels, even during tough times, when our economy is being strangled by bad policies from the same governments that benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I have a good working relationship with the Premier of Quebec. He's a pro-enterprise Premier. He is supporting liquefied natural gas projects. He's joined us in opposition to the federal carbon tax, joined us in opposition to the Bill C-69 fiasco, and on many other issues has lined up with this province. But he expressed opposition to Energy East. When the Premier of New Brunswick said to Prime Minister Trudeau, "How can we get Energy East back or a project like it?" Prime Minister Trudeau said, "Go get Quebec onside." He handed a unilateral veto to one province on a nation-building, interprovincial piece of infrastructure. That's just not how the federation should work. A week after that veto card was played by Quebec, guess what happened? Ottawa announced that Quebec was getting an additional \$1.3 billion in their transfers.

Quebec now receives – and let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I shouldn't have to say this. Sometimes the media characterizes comments like this as Alberta Quebec-bashing. I stood up on the victory night of the last election and spoke for several minutes in French about how much Albertans respect Quebecers and how we want to be political allies with Quebec, as we have often through the history of the federation. I want that to be true again. But the truth is this, and we must speak the truth about these things: that Quebec has been receiving \$13 billion a year in equalization payments from Ottawa over recent years – it's gone from \$8 billion to \$13 billion – while they have been, through much of that time, leading Canada in economic growth and employment. Pre-COVID pandemic Quebec's unemployment rate was, I think, 6.2 per cent, and Alberta's was north of 9 per cent and for a while north of 10

per cent. So we had – how does this work, Mr. Speaker? – unemployed Albertans funding subsidized daycare in Quebec for employed Quebecers.

Since the NDP came to office, we've been running large deficits, average deficits under the NDP of about \$8 billion, \$9 billion a year. Quebec, through all that period, has been running consistent fiscal surpluses. Why would an economy in a deep deficit be forced to generously subsidize an economy and a government that is experiencing serial surpluses, Mr. Speaker? Why would Quebec students be able to go to university at lower, substantially lower, tuition rates? Think of Alberta students who have to go out there, the ones who take a job to put their way through university: the taxes they pay are subsidizing the postsecondary education of their Quebec counterparts while these students are having a hard time finding a job at 15 per cent youth unemployment, and Quebec had much lower unemployment. How is that fair to those young people?

When that same province, which I truly do love – I love the people of Quebec, their language, their culture. I love the fact that they fight for themselves. They stand up for themselves. They're proud of their history and their identity. I think those are all virtues, Mr. Speaker. Yet we have a disagreement on one very important issue, which is shipping oil safely. We don't understand why the majority of Quebecers are – by the way, our quarrel is not with the people of Quebec. The polls consistently show that the majority of Quebecers would prefer more pipelines to be built to buy and consume western Canadian energy rather than to be forced to depend on OPEC and American oil imports. Our quarrel is not with the people of Quebec but with governments of Quebec. I say to all of our partners across the federation: if you want the benefit of Alberta energy, you've got to let us develop the energy. You've got to ensure a future – yes, an environmentally responsible future but a future – for this, the largest sector of the Canadian economy. That is the implicit message of Motion 83.

Now, Mr. Speaker, why is this motion here? Because in the late 1980s the government of then Premier Getty, during the time of Meech Lake and Charlottetown, brought forward the Constitutional Referendum Act to ensure that the people of Alberta would have the final say over any proposed constitutional amendments, and rightfully so. It has not been triggered yet. There has not yet been a referendum. Well, there was the Charlottetown accord referendum in 1992, but that was a federally administered referendum. So we have not had a provincial referendum on a constitutional amendment. This would be the first under that law, that was adopted, I think, circa 1988. Basically, it says that the Legislature itself cannot unilaterally propose a constitutional amendment. It has to go through the people of Alberta first, and the government must table and adopt a motion specifying what the question will be. This motion is in fulfillment of the statutory requirements of the Constitutional Referendum Act, which I think, as a result of subsequent amendments recently proposed by the hon. Minister of Justice, is now simply called the Referendum Act.

There will be parameters around the conduct of this referendum. No one campaign or advocate will be able to spend more than \$500,000, for example. It will be held concurrent, as we promised, with the next municipal election. I know I've heard some mayors, municipal councillors complaining that they think it somehow distracts from their municipal elections. Mr. Speaker, I don't know about you, but I give Alberta voters a whole lot more credit than that. We ask them to go to the ballot at municipal election time to choose their school board trustees, Catholic and public, their councillors, their mayor, and often on municipal plebiscites as well. I know in Calgary we'll be voting on fluoride again. I don't know what my position on that is, but people are smart enough to figure

out where they stand on fluoride and where they stand on equalization, right? I mean, come on.

8:20

In many American states they have ballots with two dozen, three dozen public officials and then, like, two dozen, three dozen citizens' initiatives. Mr. Speaker, we're not exactly overdosing on democracy up here, having one or two referendum questions together with electing a couple of public officials. Give me a break. You know what? I'll just call it for what it is. I think the people that are complaining about that – maybe they don't want more people turning out. I think more turnout is a good thing for democracy. We have terribly low turnout in municipal elections. I think that typically in school board, municipal elections it's, like, 30, 35 per cent turnout. Is that about right? Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping very much that Albertans who don't normally vote in municipal elections will take this as an opportunity to show up and speak on this important referendum. I have every confidence that we can have a thoughtful, respectful, democratic debate about not just equalization itself but the broader system of fiscal federalism and Alberta's role in the federation.

Should this pass, I would then immediately table a motion in this Assembly seeking concurrence to formalize Alberta's first legal step towards a constitutional amendment. Should that motion then be passed by this House, ratifying the democratic choice of Albertans, I would then immediately write to the Prime Minister, whoever it might be at that time, indicating, I hope, that the vast majority of Albertans have passed this proposed amendment on a clear question. I will append to my letter the decision of the majority of the court of the Supreme Court in the 1998 Quebec secession reference, and I will quote it chapter and verse and say: "The Supreme Court has been clear, Prime Minister. Your government now has a binding obligation to negotiate this matter of equalization with us in good faith." Then – thank God we'll be able to get on planes by then – I'll go down to Ottawa with a long list of demands about what this province requires to be able to ensure a prosperous future.

Mr. Speaker, I commend this motion to this House. This motion was a central part of the platform on which this government was elected. I will share with the House – I don't often dispense political advice to the NDP, but I'll do it now. I know they love equalization. I know they love shipping \$21 billion a year down to the rest of the country. I know they love Trudeau killing all those pipelines. I know they never objected to the tanker ban or C-69. I know we know all that, but I would just plead with them.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I would let the Premier's comments go, but I thought it was a bit too much. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) the Premier said: I know we love Bill C-69, and they let it go. Prior to that, he also mentioned about the Premier, now the Leader of the Official Opposition, asking PM Trudeau to please cancel the Northern Gateway and those pipelines. I do not think that these things have anything that are factually relevant or correct. On Bill C-69, our government was the only government that made a submission. When the UCP came into power, they just approved and accepted those submissions. I would say that, sure, the Premier is entitled to his opinion but not to his facts. The

Premier should not be making remarks that will create disorder in this House.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could quote many comments by the Leader of the Official Opposition and many members of the NDP caucus, both in and out of government, when it comes to the issues that the hon. the Premier has spoken about tonight and their position when it comes to certain pipelines. For the purpose of this point of order I'll keep it very simple. John Horgan, the Premier of B.C., who the Leader of the Official Opposition used to be a staffer for – when she as Premier went to meet with John Horgan and they asked if she, the Premier of Alberta at that time, raised with the Premier of B.C. Keystone XL, Northern Gateway, and those pipelines . . .

An Hon. Member: Trans Mountain.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Trans Mountain. Sorry. Correction. I get so excited about this issue, but it's Trans Mountain.

The Premier, an NDP Premier of the province to the west of us, who the then Premier used to work for before that, said, and I quote: she never even raised it with me. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the record of the Official Opposition on pipelines, it's dismal, but that's irrelevant because this is a matter of debate before this Assembly.

The Speaker: Agreed. This is a matter of debate. It's not a point of order.

The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: On the point of order?

The Speaker: No.

Debate Continued

Mr. Kenney: Just to continue. All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was actually concluding by saying – I was just advising the Official Opposition, Mr. Speaker, to listen to Albertans on this. Pretty consistently we've seen for years now massive super majority support for the concept of this referendum. It's not the be-all and the end-all. It's not the end game of the strategy for a fair deal, but it's a very important tool in the tool box. It's an opportunity for Albertans to assert themselves and to demand fairness, and I therefore commend this motion to the Assembly. [some applause]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, Government Motion 83. Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has risen.

Mr. Barnes: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's my privilege to rise and speak to this motion as well. As a member of the government's Fair Deal Panel equalization was one of the major issues we discussed at length with hundreds of Albertans during our many trips across Alberta about a year and a half ago. In many ways it is an issue that has come to represent the entire fair deal issue.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 20 per cent of Albertans went to the mic and said that our deal with Canada is so unfair, so broken that they wanted out. Up to 80 per cent said that or said that they wanted to work within the Canadian Confederation to get a fairer deal for their communities and their families. But let's be clear. "Equalization" became the word, the focus for the entire fair deal issue. It encapsulated the lack of resource movement, the differences in values in eastern Canada while our families in our

communities are so hurting, the Alberta action items that this government could do instantly from our police force to our tax collection to our pension plans to more control over immigration. Those inequities I heard about many, many times: the lack of representation on the Supreme Court, how elections are decided before we're even home from the polls, and how many of the provinces in eastern Canada have a lot more members in the House of Commons than their population would warrant in comparison to Albertans and Albertan families. Equalization became the focus.

People look at the way this federal program is structured, and they rightly recognize that the equalization formula is rigged, rigged against us in many ways, just the way Confederation is rigged against the west also in many different ways. When you look at the details of how the formula was designed, you have to wonder exactly what the people who structured it were thinking. Why wouldn't they want fairness and equity for all Canadians? Why wouldn't they want all Canadians to have the opportunity to grow and prosper and have hope? You have to wonder why the federal government would create such an uneven playing field. You again have to wonder whose political interests this formula serves. I would love to ask the people that wrote this formula these very questions and many, many more. But the bottom line is that through equalization and a variety of other federal programs, our province is treated like a colony rather than a full, equal partner in Confederation.

Mr. Speaker, this has to stop. Albertans deserve a fair deal. Alberta families deserve a fair deal, and they deserve a government willing to get tough, take risks, and fight for our province and our people. That is why I fully support this equalization referendum. Many of my friends and colleagues in the House: we were elected on a platform that included this referendum on equalization. As such, I will use every tool at my disposal to fight for a fair deal for Albertans, and I will offer my full-throated support during the upcoming referendum campaign.

8:30

However, Mr. Speaker, as I told the Premier when the Fair Deal Panel's final report was issued, much, much more is needed. Much, much more is expected. When we're talking about equalization, we're talking about a program that has failed our province not just for the past decade but for generations. The last number I heard was total transfers of over \$670 billion out of Alberta families and out of Alberta communities since 1960.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't a Conservative failure or even a Liberal failure. It's a complete failure of federalism. The equalization referendum will help to bring these issues to public attention, which is a small step forward. As I said, however, this referendum alone does not go far enough to make the changes that Albertans need and expect to be treated fairly in Confederation. A successful outcome on this referendum will not fix Bill C-69. It will not repeal Bill C-48. It will not lift the cap on the fiscal stabilization program, as failed earlier. It will not repeal the federal carbon tax, that past Premier Brad Wall of Saskatchewan so clearly pointed out was so unfair to families in provinces with carbon-based industries.

It will not bring back EnCana from the United States. It will not bring back the Teck Resources Frontier mine project and the thousands of jobs for all Canadians and Albertans and tradespeople and hard workers. It will not bring back the Keystone XL pipeline or the more than \$1.5 billion that Alberta taxpayers lost investing in this project. It will not bring back the Energy East pipeline proposal. It will not institute free trade between provinces. It will not change the fact that Quebec, the major, major recipient of equalization, now has a balanced budget and has a generational

fund for the future generations of Quebec almost as big as our heritage fund.

Mr. Speaker, it also will not provide fairness in other federal transfers. It will not protect Alberta from further federal intrusions into areas of provincial jurisdiction, and there are so many of those, from reaching into our land use and our carbon tax and our environmental. It will not change the imbalance in the Senate. It will not make the Senate effective. It will not change the unfairness in the House of Commons seats. It will not give us equitable representation on the Supreme Court. It will not prevent Ottawa from signing on to international treaties that surrender Canadian jurisdiction over a variety of issues, especially when it pertains to Alberta industries. It will not add property rights to the Canadian Constitution.

In many ways, when it comes to the failures of federalism, equalization is just the tip of the iceberg. This government, under Premier Kenney, has made very little progress in addressing . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a long-standing tradition in this Chamber that we do not use members' names. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat would know that, being a returning member. I'd ask him to maybe just adhere to that decorum.

The Speaker: I have to admit that I did miss whether or not he used the name, but if he did, of course, it would be unacceptable and unparliamentary to do such a thing.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for pointing that out. I'll change that and withdraw that.

Debate Continued

Mr. Barnes: Under the Premier we've made very little progress in addressing almost all of these issues, and – guess what? – Albertans have noticed. The time for empty gestures is over. The time for vague letters to Ottawa is over. Albertans are demanding real action to protect our economy, to protect our communities, protect our jobs, and protect our families. Mr. Speaker, the anger is real, and it's boiling over.

What concerns me the most about the equalization referendum is that not only have I lost faith in the Premier's ability to fight and win this campaign; in fact, his personal popularity dropping threatens the very outcome of this referendum. An example I have of that, Mr. Speaker: at today's press conference announcing – announcing – the equalization referendum and how crucial this is to Cypress-Medicine Hat and all of Medicine Hat, one question on the referendum; every single other question centred around improprieties, the lack of direction, and Patigote. This is a real concern when Alberta families are depending on this. The Official Opposition has been leading the government for six months, and during that time we have seen the government's popularity plummet. There is no hiding the facts: he is the least popular Premier in Canada, and to the extent which he's a drag on his own party, will make it a drag on this referendum, and may hurt us all.

It's good, though, that this vote is not just party members; it's all Albertans who vote in referendums. Mr. Speaker, I am going to be

working hard to ask all Albertans to get out and make sure that their voices are heard, to make sure that they support a change in the Canadian Confederation, to make sure that Albertans finally start to work towards getting a fair deal for Alberta in spite of the lack of effort in the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, this referendum offers Albertans a historic opportunity to stand up to Ottawa. To stand up to Ottawa: that's what at least 80 per cent of the Albertans that took the time, the trouble, and the effort to present to the Fair Deal Panel were asking for and demanding. We simply cannot afford to blow this opportunity. This referendum has to be about demanding fairness for Albertans, all Albertans. That is a recipe for success. It cannot and must not be about the political rehabilitation or the political popularity of the government or the Premier.

I have often stated that Alberta can and should be the strongest, freest, most prosperous jurisdiction in North America. Our hard workers, our risk takers, our skilled men and women – and, Mr. Speaker, this will only happen if our province has the opportunity to shrug off the shackles holding us back, and Albertans seize our destiny, insist on a better deal like Quebec and the eastern elites have since the beginning of Confederation. The stakes are too high for Alberta families to accept anything less.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to rise today and speak to Government Motion 83, moved by the hon. Premier. The purpose of this motion is to debate the question of whether section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment in principle on equalization payments, should be removed from the Constitution. This is a very important question and one that every Canadian has the right to know the answer to. If the Legislature approves the referendum question, it will be held along with municipal and Senate elections in the fall of 2021.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For those who may not know what we mean when we say "equalization," please let me explain. Equalization payments are financial transfers from Ottawa that address the fiscal differences between the provinces. Albertans fund equalization through federal tax contributions, which are then transferred by the federal government to other provinces for their programs and services. Mr. Speaker, Alberta sends about \$20 billion in transfers to the other provinces through the federal government each year. For the record between 2014 and 2019 Albertans made a net contribution of more than \$100 billion to the federal government through transfers to the rest of Canada, and over the last 25 years Albertans contributed more than \$400 billion.

8:40

This is a zero-sum game, a game where one side has the advantage and the other side is left with the bare minimum. Alberta is proud to help Canada flourish, but we must be treated fairly. A referendum on equalization is an opportunity for Albertans to make a strong statement to Ottawa that equalization does not work for Alberta.

Our government was elected to represent the needs of Albertans to the best of our ability, and one way we can do this is by fighting for a fair deal. Standing up for Alberta against the federal government and foreign-funded special interests that are trying to

land-lock our goods is vital to Alberta's economic survival. Fighting for pipelines and a fair deal, including a referendum on equalization payments, are ways to achieve fairness in this nation.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Hard-working Albertans have contributed their wealth to the betterment of our Confederation for generations, and they deserve to be recognized for that. The adjustments made to the fiscal stabilization program last fall by the federal government are another failure to address the long-standing unfairness in our country. Albertans have done their part. They worked hard, sacrificed, and persevered through the unprecedented challenges that came with COVID-19 and its associated economic effects.

Mr. Speaker, as Albertans we are fortunate to be a part of a thriving democratic nation. In a strong democracy each representative from every part of the country has the privilege and right to have a say in the policies and programs that the federal government introduces. Equalization payments and federal fiscal transfers are a common-sense issue of fairness, which should be a unifying concern for the Prime Minister of Canada. I would say that it is well past the time to fight for fairness. To quote the hon. Premier: "This is not Albertans getting out a begging bowl. We don't look for welfare as a province; we look for fairness."

That's why I support Government Motion 83, which asks for the government of Canada's commitment in principle to remove equalization payments from the Constitution. I look forward to this question finally being put to Albertans this fall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has the call.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the Premier's motion about an issue that is very important for all Albertans. Fairness within Confederation has been a question that has been on the national table since Alberta joined the federation. It is an ongoing problem that Albertans have felt more keenly has not been adequately addressed over the past 40 years.

In response to Albertans and the number of unfair actions taken by Ottawa, like Bill C-48, Bill C-69, the cancellation of Energy East, the debacle of Trans Mountain, and the many other Ottawa-knows-best policies that have damaged Alberta, our government created the Fair Deal Panel. The Fair Deal Panel was a series of consultations that included in-person meetings, online surveys, and expert interviews that sought to understand the best way to secure a fair deal for Alberta in Confederation. The panel included my colleagues from Banff-Kananaskis, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and a number of different experts. Some of those experts included Professor Moin Yahya, a professor of law at the University of Alberta and someone who has written extensively on constitutional matters as a faculty member of the Centre for Constitutional Studies. He's just one of the several accomplished panelists that sat on this important panel to help shape a vibrant and fair future for all Albertans.

While the recommendations were published some time ago, the efforts of this panel were intended to help formulate a clear question: should we abolish the equalization formula or not? Mr. Speaker, that is a direct question that challenges all Albertans to consider the issue that drives us to the heart of federation. For myself, I believe the choice is very clear.

However, before Albertans decide, they are to be informed on the issue and how we got there. As my colleague mentioned in this morning's press conference, equalization was intended to redistribute wealth to have-not provinces. That redistribution to

have-not provinces, like some in Atlantic Canada, would act to provide sufficient funds so public services of a comparable standard could be offered from province to province. Whether you were in Nova Scotia or the Atlantic, Canadians could rely on the same standard and level of public services no matter where you live in this country although, Mr. Speaker, as many scholars, pundits, and everyday Canadians have articulated, that original intent has been long forgotten.

It is a simple truth that today provinces that are currently struggling economically continue to pay more in equalization than they receive in return. That, Mr. Speaker, is the very definition of unfairness. People often say that you can't have your cake and eat it, too, yet if you analyze section 36 of the Constitution, the equalization formula set up by central Canada is set up to do just the opposite. I say that because in a recent study conducted by the Fraser Institute, the fiscal gap between have and have-not provinces has shrunk from 27 per cent in 2014-2015 to 6 per cent in 2018-19. Logically, you would think that as the gap between the have and have-not provinces decreases, so would the equalization payments, yet that's not the case. In fact, payments continue to increase year after year.

Even when Alberta, the province we call home – and we're very proud of it – is experiencing historic levels of economic decline, payments continue to go to the provinces other than Alberta. Which provinces are these payments going to? Well, if you have spent any time in this country, the answer is very obvious. Provinces like Quebec, that has experienced prolonged stretches of economic prosperity, continue to receive equalization payments. That's why equalization is a system where provinces can have their cake and eat it, too, because prosperous provinces can enjoy a booming economy while simultaneously enjoying a cherry on the top of federal top-ups.

Equalization is a rigged system that benefits the few while the rest of Canada is left empty-handed. Section 36 has become a political tool that governments like Trudeau's Liberals use to pander to their central Canadian supporters. It would be far too damaging politically for the Liberals to reform equalization as they could lose much of their key support in Quebec, which, as we know, is the key province to win in any party's bid to form a government.

However, this cannot be about politics; this must be what's right. As a government we have listened, analyzed, and know that equalization is flawed, so flawed that it is destroying our relationship within Confederation. Do Albertans want to save that relationship or let it fail? This fall the decision will be made by Albertans. I trust that Alberta will take a strong stance as a leader in Confederation with the belief that this 154-year Canadian dream can continue in an environment of economic and social fairness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) if you would like.

On the motion? I feel like an auctioneer here for a second. On the motion, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is asking the House to approve the language of a referendum question to be asked of Albertans this fall. That language is: "Should section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment to the principle of making equalization payments, be removed from the Constitution?" This is not language to adjust or fix something that isn't working as it should but to remove it altogether from the Constitution of Canada.

The principle of equalization, broadly speaking, is that all Canadians should have access to a roughly equivalent level of services for a roughly equivalent level of taxation and that in a country as vast and diverse as Canada we should all enjoy a high standard of living. To make that principle work, there is a formula by which provinces pay into the program and by which provinces receive from it.

Let's be absolutely clear on something. The formula we have today was written by the Stephen Harper government in 2009 – let me say this again for the benefit of the government members: the equalization formula we have today was written by the Stephen Harper government in 2009 – and the senior Alberta minister in that cabinet in 2009 was the current Member for Calgary-Lougheed and the current Premier. In fact, the member of that cabinet and the government of Stephen Harper are the ones to blame for the current formula.

And I'm not the first person to point that out. The current minister of jobs made this point when he was running for the PC leadership. The current Premier didn't have an answer then, and he doesn't have an answer today. This probably makes some members opposite a bit uncomfortable, that when they asked to go out and campaign this summer against this injustice, the author of this injustice is their leader, the least trusted Premier in Canada and probably the least trusted person in Alberta.

Let's be clear. The formula written by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is not fair to Alberta in several ways. One of the most obvious is the fiscal stabilization program. This is designed to protect provinces from sudden and severe shocks to government revenues. Of course, Alberta has experienced several of these, but the formula written by the current Premier imposes a cap on the amount of help a province can get. So when we experienced the oil crashes in 2014 and 2020, we did not get all of the help that we have a right to. This issue is one of those rare moments of agreement between our parties. But our leader and the current Official Opposition leader have called for this program to be fixed and for Alberta to be paid out the billions in support that would be proportional to the revenue shocks we experienced. That needs fixing, but that's not what this referendum question does.

Let me say this again, that on this side of the House our leader and the current Premier both have one thing in common, that the formula that exists now is not working. That needs to be fixed, but this referendum does nothing to fix that. The way that our natural resource revenue is calculated is not fair to Alberta. For example, Quebec generates significant economic activity from its hydroelectricity, and its Crown corporation, Hydro-Québec, generates billions for the Quebec government. But because it is a Crown corporation, those dollars that go to the government of Quebec aren't considered tax. That, in the view of the Official Opposition, is just one example of how the natural resources component of the formula is not fair. That needs fixing, but that's not what this referendum question does.

We have seen the problem of the GDP growth rate rule, introduced by the now Premier when he was in the federal cabinet. This growth rate rule ensures that each and every year, no matter what happens with the fiscal capacity of the provinces, the equalization pie continues to grow. So even in a theoretical situation where the fiscal capacities of the provinces converge, the equalization pie still increases. That makes no sense. This growth rate rule was brought in by the Stephen Harper government, which the Member for Calgary-Lougheed was a part of when he was Alberta's senior lieutenant in the previous federal government. It was a bad decision for Alberta.

Albertans have a right to be upset about the unfair system that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed has helped impose on Albertans. Alberta families have lost jobs, they have lost homes, and in some

cases they have lost hopes. But let's be very clear on another thing. This referendum does nothing to get Albertans back to work or back in their homes or back on a path to prosperity. In fact, this referendum does nothing. It doesn't remove equalization or even start a process that might lead there. It does nothing. Is this whole exercise really about solving a fiscal problem for Albertans or a political problem for the least trusted Premier across this country?

It is fundamentally dishonest for the provincial government to ask Albertans if they want something that the provincial government cannot deliver, especially when this government is failing at delivering Albertans the things it can. Let's go through these. Only the UCP government could impose a program called Alberta jobs now and then be five months late to launch an inadequate program, a program that by the government's best estimate will replace less than half of the jobs they lost before the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans are still looking for work. Tens of thousands of Albertans have given up looking entirely. This referendum does nothing for these Albertans.

9:00

The federal government has come up with billions of dollars to provide affordable child care. This would support hundreds of thousands of Alberta parents in getting back to work, but the provincial government refuses to come to the table.

There was even money from Ottawa to pay out a wage top-up to critical workers, and this provincial government was months late in actually getting that money into Alberta workers' pockets. Of all the injustices that are being experienced by Alberta families, many of them are due to the incompetence of this UCP government. They're failing at the things that are within their control, that are within their jurisdiction, so now they want to talk about things that are outside of their control. That is fundamentally dishonest.

I hope that the members opposite are asking themselves: "Will this create jobs? Will it drive economic growth? Will it attract investment to Alberta?" The answer to all of these questions is no. So why is the government planning to spend so much time and energy on it? Albertans would like to know that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only question is – we're talking about a referendum on equalization. I heard the speech from the member opposite talking about a lot of numbers. My question is: do they believe that this formula is fair? Do they believe that Albertans are getting a fair share? Do they think that they should bring a change? I'll be least interested in who wrote this formula or not. Nobody talked about this. So my question, through you to the member: does he believe in this formula? Does he want any change? If there is a problem, what is the solution? I want to listen to the solution. Numbers games won't create jobs. Numbers: we're talking about \$20 billion, \$20,000 million per year. That's a lot of money. I can see the wishful list somebody introduced yesterday that will bring \$10 daycare to Alberta. We subsidized this to Quebec, but will this opposition ask for the same from Quebec, that they can subsidize our \$10 daycare, too? These are the questions. I hope that the member can answer these.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall should he choose to respond.

Mr. Sabir: I'm very happy to, Mr. Speaker. Let me say this in unequivocal terms. The formula that we have today is not working.

I said in my remarks that on this side of the House we agree with the Premier and with the government that this program needs to be fixed and Albertans should be getting a fair share, fair treatment. But since the member is asking about the formula, I can tell the member that he can ask the Premier, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. He will be in the best position to tell the member what's not working . . .

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

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Point of Order Referring to Proper Titles

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suspect this member knew that this point of order was coming. You did speak at great length recently in this Legislature about the use of members' constituencies in lieu of their title as Premier or, in the case prior, the hon. Health minister. This is the second time the Member for Calgary-McCall has referred to the hon. Premier as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I don't know if this is a standing precedent that they want to continue to set. You have spoken and asked that the members opposite respect the titles and honour that comes with being a member of Executive Council, something that was given to them when they were in government in addition to referring to their leader as a member of the opposition and not just the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. While I state no specific point of order, you have ruled on this. There is precedent in this Chamber to make that ruling again.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader if he chooses to respond to the point of order.

Mr. Sabir: It's not a point of order.

The Speaker: I appreciate the submissions. I must confess that while that sounds like something I may have said, I don't recall a specific ruling with respect to the titles inside the Chamber. Of course, members ought to refer to individuals by their titles. I encourage them to do so. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall ought to do that, but the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed is also the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I'm not sure that there is a point of order to be heard here, but I think it's reasonable to be respectful of members of the Executive Council.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I was trying to clarify for the benefit of the Member for Calgary-Falconridge – should I also be adding Calgary UCP caucus chair, in the new role after the previous caucus chair stepped aside? I was just trying to make sure that I'm referring to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and our current Premier, that he should be asking that question to our Premier and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who then was a cabinet minister in Stephen Harper's government, who was negotiating that formula.

The then Prime Minister – I'm paraphrasing – when he was asked by provinces about this equalization program, his comments were to the effect: it's a federal program; provinces don't have a say in it. I'm paraphrasing it. That's not the direct quote. That was the attitude of our Premier when they were in government in Ottawa.

Certainly, I agree with the Member for Calgary-Falconridge that this formula needs fixing. When we saw a drop in our resource revenues, when we saw our economy get hit by the recession, we didn't get the support that we needed from Ottawa. When we were in government, we were asking for better support. We were advocating on behalf of Albertans so they can get our fair share from Ottawa and they can get the help that they need from Ottawa. With respect to the specific question, that it's unfair how this formula was negotiated, the member said that he doesn't want to talk about who negotiated it. No. Albertans want to talk about that, who negotiated it. Albertans have every right to know who negotiated it. Albertans even have a right to know that when they were in Ottawa and they were negotiating this formula – what was going through their mind? What were they thinking at that point? Will they never come back to Alberta again or what?

Those are very important questions. The Member for Calgary-Falconridge should talk to the Premier and ask about these questions, should enlighten this House, should share with us in this House why that formula was negotiated by our Premier back in the day that was so not fair for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has introduced Motion 83, seeking approval to hold a referendum on whether Albertans believe the principle of making equalization payments should be removed from Canada's Constitution, and I support this motion. The governing Liberals in Ottawa took it upon themselves to renew the equalization program in 2018 without any input from Albertans. I believe it is time Albertans have an opportunity to have their say.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, over the last 25 years Albertans have paid over \$400 billion more into federal transfer programs than they have received. In the last 10 years alone Alberta has contributed more than \$200 billion despite unprecedented economic challenges during the last five years. This degree of wealth redistribution goes well beyond anything envisioned in our federation's establishment. Albertans have paid more than their fair share despite our commodity-based economy leaving us more vulnerable to shifts in public services, and we continue to contribute. It is impossible to justify taking such a large sum from taxpayers in one province and sending it to other provincial governments to meet their provincial responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, the equalization program is an indicator of a much larger wealth redistribution problem within our country. While this federal program is supposed to ensure that each province can provide reasonably comparable levels of public services at reasonably comparable levels of taxation as per section 36(2) of the Constitution, the equalization program has grown to be increasingly controversial and inequitable, with indications of much larger problems.

Mr. Speaker, equalization emerged as a stand-alone program in 1957 though its origins can be traced back to the Second World War. In 1941 the provinces let go of their income tax and their state tax domains in return for cash transfers from the federal government. These tax rental arrangements were created to enable the federal government to finance the war effort. However, after World War II ended, policy-makers in Ottawa were hesitant to return these taxes to the provinces. Ironically, during these initial years both Quebec and later Ontario considered the continuation of these tax rental arrangements as a sign of fiscal centralism, a theme

that has not changed to this day. Since 1957 the equalization program has evolved in terms of the number of tax revenue bases for which provincial fiscal capacities are equalized and the standard fiscal capacity against which shortfalls are to be measured.

In 1962 a new revenue base was added to equalization; a province's natural resource revenues were included as the fourth revenue base to be equalized. The changes to add natural resource revenues to the equalization program were driven by the desire to exploit Alberta's oil revenues. It is this treatment of natural resource revenues that has now become the most troublesome issue.

In the words of Thomas Courchene, a leading expert on Canada's equalization program, treatment of resource revenues is "a theoretical and empirical minefield," an issue that "one copes with rather than solves." From 1982 to 2004, except for some technical adjustments, the program has remained generally the same in its basic approach.

Mr. Speaker, it is well known that the federal equalization program is inequitable, with the wealthy have provinces always paying for the program that lines the pockets of provinces that continue to chastise the hand that feeds them. The core principle of that equalization, raising the financial ability of provinces to a benchmark fiscal capacity through financial transfers, has created undesirable and infectious incentives for provinces. Recipient provinces know that any expansion of a province's own tax base will raise its fiscal capacity, leading to a decrease in its equalization entitlement. Equalization discourages fiscal responsibility, which in the long run causes harm to recipient provinces by incentivizing misguided policy choices and thus exerting downward pressure on economic growth.

The program creates strong disincentives for natural resource development in have-not provinces since a substantial share of any additional revenue is clawed back through reduced equalization payments.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, increased cash grants from Ottawa restrain provincial autonomy. Former Quebec Premier Maurice Duplessis said it best:

A central government which would appropriate to itself the sources of taxation would, by this very fact, reduce the provinces to legislative impotence. Effectively, a province with no other revenues than federal subsidies would become a kind of inferior organism, under control of the authority which could measure out its means of subsistence . . . Such a situation would amount to replacing the reins enabling one to drive with shackles that paralyze and enslave.

Those words were spoken in 1955, and they are just as true now as they were then.

The ever-growing directive of the federal equalization program has allowed Ottawa to control areas not mandated as part of their jurisdiction under our federation. Burton Kellock and Sylvia LeRoy pointed out in a 2006 Fraser Institute study that this "debate over the specific requirements of the Constitution's commitment to equalization ignores a more fundamental issue: equalization uses federal revenues to fund spending in areas of provincial jurisdiction." Mr. Speaker, because equalization uses federal tax revenues to fund spending in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, the entire equalization program falls beyond the powers of the federal government as defined by Canada's founding Constitution of 1867.

If one breach isn't enough, there are now three types of transfers coming out of Ottawa: the Canadian social transfer, the Canadian health transfer, and equalization. With the presence of the first two ensuring that both health and social standards are effectively guaranteed and efficiently funded, what becomes the purpose of the equalization program? Education, health, municipalities, social

assistance, and social services are all included in areas for redistribution payments and are all exclusive areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, by continuing the current trajectory, we would be allowing the federal government to retain control over these provincial areas of responsibility. The rise of more and more transfer payments coming from Ottawa, the argument for continuing the equalization program, becomes null and void. Continuing the equalization program amongst the system of increasing federal transfer programs is akin to double-dipping by receiving provinces.

A referendum on equalization is an opportunity for Albertans to make a strong statement to Ottawa that equalization does not work for Alberta, let alone for the long-term sustainability of this country. It is no longer possible to justify this program without major change. I hope everyone in this Chamber understands that Albertans should have an opportunity for input when it comes to equalization. I say: let's give them one with a referendum on the validity of the program. I support Motion 83 to give Albertans that opportunity to have their say.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there others? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today to speak to Government Motion 83. Government Motion 83 reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly determine, pursuant to section 3 of the Referendum Act, the following as the question to be put to electors at a referendum and to which the response from an elector who votes in that referendum must be either yes or no: should section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment to the principle of making equalization payments, be removed from the Constitution?

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of this question fulfills another platform commitment that this government ran on in the last election.

For a long time Albertans have less formally spoken against and spoken out against equalization. This, however, is a chance for a very formal stand to be taken on this issue of equalization. In true democratic fashion the people of Alberta will have the chance to vote on this issue, with a clear question being posed to them.

9:20

Now, let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, that this is not about the political stripe that you wear. Rather, it's about how Albertans from all walks of life feel about their role as taxpayers within Canada. It is about the vast amount of money that we have sent to Ottawa that could have been used to improve the lives of Albertans. This must not be about left versus right or orange versus blue. This is about fairness in equalization.

Alberta has done well economically. We've chosen to be industrious. I don't think you have to go much further than my constituency to be able to see that that's true. We've developed our resources. We've created good-paying jobs that have made this province the great place that it is to be able to work and live and to raise our families. However, while Albertans may not mind helping other provinces in Canada through transfers, I think they do mind helping provinces that have not bothered to create the conditions possible for their own success. But if we are going to be part of a transfer system of wealth, if we are going to be part of an

equalization process, I think most Albertans would say that we must be allowed to pursue prosperity.

You cannot lock down our resources and expect an equalization payment to continue. You cannot stifle our access to North America and the rest of the world and keep our resources locked in our province. You cannot tax us to help other provinces and then stand in the way of our prosperity and expect us to continue to finance the rest of the country.

The obvious example here is Quebec. Quebec has chosen not to develop many of its natural resources, and even now their government is aware that if they see an increase in natural resource revenue, they will lose out on equalization transfers proportionately. This has become a conscious choice for Quebec. The fact is that Albertans have sent a net amount of about \$240 billion to Ottawa from about 2007 to 2018, an average of \$21.8 billion per year. I'm sure we can all imagine the things that we could have done with that money here in Alberta, with an extra \$21.8 billion. Think of the reduction in our debt. During that same period, Mr. Speaker, Quebec received about \$170 billion in equalization. Now, some people would argue that this is to even out the income levels, but we don't see it that way. Alberta's low tax rates have made it the booming economic success that it has been historically. We've been able to achieve that through resource development. It's not been perfect, but it has led to Alberta contributing more money from 2007 to 2018 than British Columbia and Ontario combined. Quebec opts for higher taxes and an economy that leaves much of its resources in the ground and promotes mostly lower income jobs.

The general idea behind equalization is to make sure that provinces have the ability to spend equally on their citizens as the other provinces within the federation. Let's take a look at that. In 2021 Quebec will have an income after equalization of about \$118.2 billion. Now, with a population of around 8.485 million people this enables the government of Quebec to spend about \$13,930 per resident from their budget. Let's compare this to Alberta. Alberta will have an income this year of about \$43.7 billion, and with a population of about 4.371 million people, that allows us to spend \$9,997 per resident. This, Mr. Speaker, is the problem.

The outdated equalization concept is no longer about equalizing a province's ability to provide for its residents; it has become a mechanism for provinces to choose to say no to resource development, yes to lower paying jobs, and a means by which Ottawa can buy votes in Quebec. All of these are a slap in the face to Albertans, who work hard to provide for themselves and to subsidize the rest of the country.

An example of something that Quebec can afford to do that Alberta cannot do because of this equalization disaster is subsidize child daycare. The Quebec cost for child care in qualifying spaces is about \$8.50 per day. In 2015 they spent \$2.6 billion on that program, and in Alberta we were having a debate about trying to get costs down to \$25 per day. While the benefit of such a program remains debatable, it would be obvious now, through the previous calculations, that it would be much more affordable to accomplish subsidized child care in Alberta if we were not busy paying for Quebec's subsidies.

Opponents of this referendum have often said that it is pointless because it's not binding on Ottawa. While this is true, that should not mean that we do nothing. This is about starting, about starting somewhere. This is about starting with democracy and having the people speak for what they want to see. That is the whole purpose of our system, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we are here today speaking to Motion 83. We've talked about this for a long time in Alberta, that Albertans have never had a chance to hold an official

vote directing their provincial government to take a stand on equalization. Putting this question forward is where we shall begin.

This is about fairness, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to this question finally being put to Albertans this fall. It is long overdue. I encourage all Albertans to make their voices heard and to think about this for what it is. It's not a partisan issue; it's about fairness for Albertans, the citizens of Canada. I look forward to Government Motion 83 being placed before the people of Alberta, and I would encourage them to give it great thought and cast their votes wisely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, Government Motion 83. The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Government Motion 83, a motion that would give Albertans the opportunity to have their say on equalization. I came into the Chamber tonight not necessarily planning to speak to the motion, but listening to fellow members lay out the rationale for taking this question to Albertans, listening to the Premier lay out the incredible history of this federation, the challenges within this federation, and the issue with equalization and, more broadly, our federal fiscal transfer programs has inspired me to get up and say a few words. Mr. Speaker, there's been much said tonight already, so my comments will be brief as I'll try not to duplicate too much of what has been said.

9:30

Mr. Speaker, the principle of equalization is of course built on the principle of ensuring that all Canadians, regardless of where they live, have reasonable services regardless of the individual prosperity of their communities. I support that principle in general. As the Premier noted earlier, I would not want to see glaring poverty in one region of this nation while other regions enjoy great prosperity.

Alberta, as many have stated tonight, has made an outsized contribution to this federation. As many have stated already tonight, in the last five years Alberta's net fiscal transfers – net fiscal transfers – to the federation have exceeded \$100 billion. Since the 1960s our net contribution has been over \$650 billion. Mr. Speaker, people question the province of Alberta and say: why don't you have a sovereign wealth fund like Norway? Our sovereign wealth fund went to Ottawa and was disbursed across the nation. That's why taking this question to Albertans is absolutely essential.

The question we can ask is: how did Alberta come to be this great economic engine of growth and wealth creation? Let me start by saying this. The principal, fundamental reason, I believe, that Alberta has grown to be the wealth-creation engine of the nation is the entrepreneurial, hard-working, innovative, risk-taking character of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, that is the bedrock, foundational reason for Alberta becoming the wealth-creation engine of the nation. Then you couple that with the incredible natural resources that this province has been blessed with and you combine that with the strong rule of law, particularly with respect to property rights and economic freedom, and you have the formula for great wealth creation. That's what's happened in the last 60 to 70 years in the province of Alberta. In fact, I would suggest that in many parts of the nation there is not a road, a school, a hospital, or a bridge that cannot point to the wealth-creation engine that is Alberta to fund that infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, there have been some comments made tonight about the formula, the specifics of the formula, and I want to make

a few comments about the formula because the formula is flawed. Even if you believe in equalization – as I mentioned, I believe in the principle – this formula is flawed. At this point in time nonrenewable resource revenues are included in the calculation. They're not included at a 100 per cent inclusion rate but at 50 per cent. I would suggest that their inclusion at any level leaves the formula flawed. As has been noted by friends on both sides of the aisle, this feature of the formula provides great disincentive for every province to fully make decisions on whether they will develop their resources or not. Every province should have that sovereign decision-making ability, as outlined in the Constitution, but I assert that every province should then live with the economic consequences of that decision and not depend on other regions of the nation that step out, take risks, and create wealth.

Mr. Speaker, there's another issue with the equalization formula – and it has been mentioned tonight – and that is the floor mechanism that prompts the program to continue to grow with national GDP growth at a time when income disparity across the nation is beginning to level. That is a problem with the equalization formula. In fact, in the last few years provinces in this nation have been overequalized to the tune of \$2.8 billion. In fact, in '21-22 provinces will be overequalized, because of this flaw in the formula, by over \$500 million. That is a great flaw that must absolutely be fixed.

Mr. Speaker, we spoke of the great fiscal contribution by the province of Alberta to the federation. It also includes the employment insurance program and, as the Premier mentioned, the Canada pension program. We will have more to say on that in future days as we consider the advice from the Fair Deal Panel, who recommended that we pursue a deep and thorough investigation of the opportunities that could be held for the people of Alberta with an Alberta pension plan.

Mr. Speaker, some have mentioned the fiscal stabilization program. This is a federal fiscal transfer program that is designed to provide provinces some fiscal relief when they experience great and drastic and severe drops in revenue. As I believe all of us in this House would agree, this program is flawed. This program had caps that were put upon it in the '80s, per capita caps of \$60 per person per year, which really rendered this program virtually useless to the people of Alberta, and it's a program that's designed to provide, again, provinces relief when they experience large drops in revenue. Typically those provinces with more volatile revenues are provinces that have chosen to develop their resources, so by not lifting this cap, provinces such as Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland have experienced discrimination in this federation. The federal government in their fall fiscal economic statement did announce that they were raising the cap from \$60 to \$180, but I will go on record tonight by stating that that is insufficient. The caps need to be removed for this federal fiscal transfer program to work effectively.

As has been stated here tonight, I believe that Albertans are not against the principle of fairness and equalization across the country. Mr. Speaker, when we as Albertans see other, largely, governments in other parts of this nation stand up and impede the infrastructure required to continue to develop the largest industry in the nation, the industry that contributes over 20 per cent of the nation's exports, the industry that generates by far and away the most wealth for Canadians on a per capita basis and on an absolute basis, when we as Albertans see other governments stand in the way of that necessary infrastructure while at the same time making net fiscal contributions to the federation of over \$20 billion, we say that enough is enough. Tonight we're saying that enough is enough when we support Motion 83.

I could talk, Mr. Speaker, about the Northern Gateway pipeline that was cancelled, Energy East that was cancelled, Keystone XL. After the President revoked the presidential permit, the Canadian federal government was mute, was silent, unwilling to invest an ounce of political capital on behalf of the largest wealth-creating sector in the nation. I could talk about Bill C-69, the no-pipelines bill, or C-48, the legislation that prohibits tankers from taking heavy Alberta oil to export markets while, at the same time, allowing U.S. tankers to go up and down the strait. It is absolutely nonsensical. Where's the ban on the St. Lawrence Seaway? I don't see it. I don't want it, but remove it from the northwest coast.

9:40

Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude with this. For the sake of hard-working Albertans, for the sake of Alberta families, for the sake of all Albertans, I support letting Albertans have their say on equalization, and I support Government Motion 83.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Minister of Finance. Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for standing up and sharing some of his concerns that he has with the equalization program. I think we can all agree that the program needs to change and that there are areas that need to be improved, and I don't think that on either side of this House that's disputable.

What I do find very interesting, though, is the rewriting of history that has been occurring for most of this evening when it comes to how the equalization program came into place. I would like to remind all members of this Chamber that the hon. Premier was in cabinet under the hon. Prime Minister Harper when many of these issues that the actual minister just spoke about were written.

Let's talk about what happened under the formula that the hon. Premier wrote; that is, one of the first things that was written in was the fiscal sustainable stabilization component. It was supposed to be designed to protect provinces from sudden and severe shocks for government revenue, written, again, by this very Premier. The hon. Minister of Finance just said that that is a flawed way to look at things. It has not benefited Alberta whatsoever. The Premier wrote it. The Premier didn't have to put into play an equalization program, but when in government, when in the federal government, that decision was made. Absolutely, it should be changed, but in retrospect maybe the Premier would like to admit that was a mistake and that it shouldn't have been put in to begin with.

Now, the other thing that I found very interesting that the minister spoke about was the GDP growth rate rule, again introduced by this Premier while he was in cabinet. So many of the issues that we are speaking about this evening, the issues that have negatively impacted Alberta and have created many of the concerns and issues around our revenue and the fact that our heritage trust fund has been depleted and all of the concerns that the hon. minister just spoke about, were put in place by the Premier.

What I'm struggling with here this evening is that we are having a conversation about a decision that the hon. Premier made when he was in government, and he now wants to spend more money, more of Albertans' money, to have an equalization referendum on a very issue that he created. Will that be part of the honesty that goes out to Albertans? Will he say to Albertans: "Albertans, I made a mistake. I created this mess. I know how to fix it. I could have fixed it. I chose not to fix it, could have fixed it."

A reminder is that this equalization formula was written in 2009. I believe the hon. Premier was still in government until 2012, 2014?

There were lots of opportunities for the hon. Prime Minister Harper and the hon. Premier to have gone back and been, like: oh, wait a minute; this equalization formula is going to have a very negative impact on Alberta. Fun fact: both the Prime Minister and the Premier represented Alberta in Ottawa when this very formula was written.

I know that the hon. government members would like to say, you know, that this is about how unfair this was, and let's blame the current federal government. The reality of it is that the only person to blame is the current Premier because the Premier wrote the formulas. What I would really like to see is an equalization question put to Albertans that not only addresses the very issues that the Premier created but gets Albertans back to work. This question doesn't do that. It doesn't talk about jobs. It doesn't talk about the very issues that many of these members have spoken about, which is: how do we get our resources to market? It doesn't talk about diversification. It doesn't talk about our economy whatsoever. What it talks about is a very serious mistake made by this Premier while he was in the federal cabinet. Until the Premier wants to stand up and admit that he made the mistake, we should really be focusing on getting Albertans back to work.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance has 30 seconds remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others? On Government Motion 83, the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening and speak on Government Motion 83 with regard to the equalization referendum here in this province. I'm going to start off with a bit of a story. Last summer my wife and I bought a house in Cardston, put down some roots. Really happy about it. We love the community we live in. We love the town of Cardston, just can't get enough of it. But when we moved into the house, we didn't at the exact time there have a lawn mower, so the neighbours that I had, being the incredible people they are, for the first little bit, because we were here in the Legislature last summer, just took it upon themselves to render an act of service. They decided to come over and cut the grass at my house on a couple of occasions.

I thought, you know, that is really the Alberta spirit, where you see someone maybe not necessarily in need but an opportunity to serve someone else, and you help out. I, like, I suspect, all members in this Chamber, have taken opportunities to render service to their neighbours. However, goodwill does run out, Mr. Speaker. Imagine for a moment a year fast-forward from the time that I purchased that house with my wife, and I am still depending upon my neighbours to come over and cut my grass after I had purchased my own lawn mower.

It wasn't that long ago that the Quebec government tabled a budget, and one of the headlines was that Quebec is swimming in cash. Swimming in cash. Meanwhile unemployment rates in this province are at an all-time high. People in some of our most vital sectors are out of work. Families are struggling to put food on their tables. At the same time, we are involved in an equalization program with a formula that is deeply flawed, wherein the province of Quebec disproportionately accepts and, frankly, enjoys a tremendous financial benefit while their neighbours to the west, here in Alberta, are struggling. If I recall correctly, I believe I even delivered a member's statement on this. They said that they're going to use the surplus, which I believe was around \$4 billion, to lower parking fees and pay off the debt. Now, I think it's important to be paying off debt. But, Mr. Speaker, how does this seem fair when citizens in Quebec are enjoying lower parking fees while some Albertans are losing their cars?

It's a vivid picture I'm trying to paint here, Mr. Speaker, because that is the reality. Alberta has disproportionately contributed to equalization for decades. If I recall correctly – I have some notes here – in the last 40 years it's been somewhere in excess of \$600 billion. Between 2014 and 2019 Albertans made a net contribution of more than \$100 billion to the federal government through transfers to the rest of Canada that helped to rebuild critical infrastructure, something the hon. Minister of Finance made an excellent point about, that there probably isn't a road or school or piece of infrastructure in this country where Alberta doesn't have a small piece of that pie.

I am grateful to Albertans for being so generous. Alberta has always been a generous province. In fact, as recently as the beginning of this pandemic, seeing the impending problem that we were facing, the province went ahead and ordered excess ventilators, masks, and other PPE to ensure that the province had enough. In fact, we had so much that we were able to share with other provinces in need because that's what Albertans do. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans are tired of feeling taken advantage of.

9:50

The Member for Edmonton-Manning just rose and said that the hon. Premier had an opportunity to change this formula. Well, Mr. Speaker, if I recall, 2018 was the most recent opportunity that the Premier of the day had to raise the concerns about a flawed program that members on that side of the House have agreed is problematic for us, and not a peep – not a peep – from the members opposite, not a peep from the Premier of the day and now Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

As I go through my constituency of Cardston-Siksika and I talk with the constituents, there was a whole slew of concerns that they needed this government to address if elected in April 2019. Near the top of that list, right up there with repealing the job-killing carbon tax, was to fix the equalization program, stop sending money to Ottawa. While I understand, Mr. Speaker, we don't just cut a cheque to Ottawa – that's not how the program works – we do have an opportunity to raise this concern through a referendum. That is a promise we've made, and it is a promise that we are going to keep.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that members opposite might have concern with this debate, but this is actually one of the rare moments when I hear very little from the opposition. In fact, scarce is a time in this Chamber when members on that side of the House don't have anything to say. I think the last time I heard it this quiet was when we were talking about the federal imposition on firearms in this province, again, another gross overstep, but that's not the point of this evening's debate.

But, Mr. Speaker, I will stand in this Chamber on behalf of the people of Cardston-Siksika, and I suspect that when the time comes to vote in the event that this motion is passed this evening, without presupposing any outcomes, Albertans will stand and voice their concerns loudly and clearly that they are tired of being in a Confederation that takes advantage of one province and disproportionately puts us in a bad spot, where we're seeing other provinces reaping the benefits of the hard work of Albertans here.

I have through my life lived in a number of the provinces in this country – I lived in Nova Scotia, I lived in Ontario, I lived in B.C., and I've lived in Alberta – and visited every other one for various reasons. There isn't a single place that I've visited or lived in where I would ever want to see the good people of those parts of Canada fail to have access to proper infrastructure, health care, education, because we are all Canadians. We do need to look out for each other. That's a noble cause. Again, I echo the statements of many

members in this Chamber that we must look out for each other because a strong, educated, and healthy Canada is a strong country and a world player. But I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are not happy with the way they've been treated.

Members opposite suggest that this motion will not create jobs, that it won't fix the problem. Well, I understand that we have tools in our tool box to address these concerns. If we can get pipelines built in this province, both east and west and south, we can get our products to market, something that creates jobs. But the members opposite would sit idly by and say to just do nothing and point the finger and say: well, when the Premier was in Ottawa, he did nothing.

What a sad statement, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate to hear members from the opposition caucus say such things. It's unfortunate, frankly, to hear none of them speak on this save for maybe one or two members. I'm sad that we haven't heard from the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition on this bill. I'd think that when we tabled this motion, it would be something that's vitally important to members of that caucus, but it's dead silent over there. I understand why, because this motion is about fairness for Alberta.

One of the key things that has led to this is our inability to get our products to market, Mr. Speaker, through pipelines. But why on earth would members opposite want to build pipelines? They stand in this Chamber time and time again and even call points of order when we point out their opposition to getting our resources to market and suggest that they are in favour of these pipelines, yet when a chance comes to stand up for Alberta's best interests, stand up for a fair deal in this province, I don't hear anything. How can one assume that members opposite support our most vital industry in this province or one of our most vital industries when there's an opportunity right here this evening to engage in debate, yet they fail? Albertans see that. They know that. Albertans are smart, industrious people, and they recognize the truth.

Mr. Speaker, there's certainly a lot more to say on this. I absolutely support this motion. When the time comes, if there's an opportunity to vote in favour of getting a fair deal for Alberta, something that the hon. members opposite clearly have not shown much of an interest in, I will do whatever it takes. When it comes to this motion, which is on the question as it will appear on the ballot, "Should section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment to the principle of making equalization payments, be removed from the Constitution?" absolutely. Absolutely.

My colleagues have put things very eloquently this evening, and I appreciate all of their remarks, including those from the hon. Premier and the Finance minister and everyone else who has spoken and uplifted and edified this debate. I have enjoyed it thoroughly. I am sad to see that members opposite are not engaging in this debate, which tells me a whole lot. The silence speaks volumes.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 67

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to get up and say a few words in regard to Bill 67 here this evening. I think that, you know, we have an interesting opportunity here to strengthen postsecondary education generally and its interface with the trades and our trades schools and polytechnics in a more general way, too, both through this bill and otherwise. We have been engaging quite actively in having consultations with various trade leaderships – right? – of course, that have very much a lot to do with the apprenticeship programs across the province.

You know, actually, just before that, I want to say a couple of words in regard to the last motion. Of course we were actively debating the motion. We were putting up speakers. The last speaker had the audacity to say that we were not debating it, which was falsely and patently not true, and then he adjourned debate when we had more speakers to come. The hon. member likes to speak out of both sides of his mouth. He likes to play it fast and loose with the facts, Mr. Chair, and talks about democracy and then exactly says and does the opposite thing. But I guess we've been together for a couple of years, and we're used to the Member for Cardston-Siksika doing that on a regular basis. History will judge him, of course. That's the way that things work in a democracy, so God bless him, right?

10:00

Anyway, in regard to Bill 67, as I said before, we were engaging with the leadership of apprenticeship programs around the province. I had said before, in earlier parts of this debate, that we have to make sure that we're keeping an alignment with the standards for trades practices across jurisdictions, across the provinces and territories, and indeed around North America and even the world in regard to certain standards for trades. That was the premise by which we engaged the leadership of various trades programs, and they offered us some interesting analysis that I think is worth looking at.

You know, as I said before, while there are some parts of this bill that I find quite intriguing, I think that there are some places where we could make some improvements as well, so I have with me here this evening, Mr. Chair, an amendment to Bill 67. I will pass that forward to you for distribution.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

For everybody's benefit, this will be referred to in debate as amendment A1. As is the case, if you would like a copy, please raise your hand, and one will be delivered. There will also be copies on the tables at the entrances, and I'm sure the hon. member has probably already started the process with regard to e-mailing one to the table as well.

If the hon. member could please read it in for the record . . .

Mr. Eggen: You want me to read it into the record?

The Deputy Chair: . . . and then continue with your comments.

Mr. Eggen: It's a long one. Okay. On behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods I move that Bill 67, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, be amended (a) in section 13(1) by striking out "shall appoint" and substituting "shall, in accordance

with subsection (2), appoint,” and (b) by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

- (2) The Minister shall,
- (a) appoint the following as members of the Board:
 - (i) four individuals who represent employers of professionals in the designated trades;
 - (ii) four individuals who represent employees of professionals in the designated trades;
 - (iii) two individuals who represent employers of professionals in trades other than designated trades;
 - (iv) two individuals who represent employees of professionals in trades other than designated trades;
 - (b) designate one member as chair and one or more other members to act in the place of the chair when the chair is absent or otherwise unable to carry out the duties of the chair.

Okay. By making this change, I think that it helps with a more balanced composition of this board. Let's not forget, Mr. Chair, that this board forms sort of the heart of how decisions are made around trades and so forth. I think that if I can refer people specifically to the section in the bill, you know, we know that removing the compulsory trades is very concerning. When you are making changes like this, such a sort of categorical framework change, you want to make sure you retain the confidence of everybody who's involved. By making this change that my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods actually has brought forward, I think that you will go a long ways to retain and restore confidence amongst the professionals that this bill does affect, right?

We don't want compulsory trades to be otherwise, you know, watered down somehow, and we did not see any recommendation for this being done, right? We know that if we look at other jurisdictions, in British Columbia, for example, they did make this change and made moves to other forms of credentialing, including microcredentialing. I'm just curious to know if that's the direction that the minister is moving or the department is moving in regard to this change. I think that we need to know.

We deserve to know and we need to know what the impacts of that are going to be as well. Where is the devolution of accreditation moving to? What's the direction here? We have a new framework. What specifically are we pointing at here? I think, again, I brought this up in second reading, but I'll do it again. I mean, we really need to make sure that we are not watering down payments and wages for skilled professionals and for apprentices as well. Part of the reason that we have such a high success rate for employment through the apprenticeship program is that, you know, people get paid along the way. It's not like you have to wait for four or five years before you get a paycheque for your new profession. You do, through the journeyman process, engage in employment and remuneration right from the beginning, right?

We want to make sure that we do not, you know, enter into a process of deskilling various trades as well. We have, as I said before, the standards that are taken from province to province and territories as well. These standards are established and maintained by not just teachers but by the professionals who engage in the trade in the first place. Industry needs to make sure that they are hitting that standard for, let's say, electrical construction or whatever profession it happens to be – carpentry, plumbing, pipefitting, and so forth – and people need to know that there is an industrial standard that they can depend on for the structure that's being built and what have you.

I just want to refer the House here this evening, then, to various parts of the bill specifically. If you can open your Bill 67 to page 4, you will see, you know, a couple of places there. There's section 1(e), talking about an apprenticeship education program. I think that this needs to be defined in a more systemic sort of way, so I would

ask – I will not determine his absence or presence or not – the minister categorically: what is the definition of that specifically?

Also, on the same page, page 4, section (j) talks about an industry training program, meaning a program established under section 4(1)(a). Again I'm just curious to know why we have a separation of streams from what we have presently. Why is this being broken into various pieces to make that determination?

I want to move along, then, to page 6 of the bill, section 3(1). The minister may, talking about classroom instruction, establish programs to provide individuals with classroom instruction and on-the-job instruction in particular occupational fields. We want to just have some clarification on that in regard to industry programs that don't have classroom instruction from section 4. Just looking to ask for clarification: what's the difference between these two training streams, and why does one have a classroom component and the other part does not? Again, just asking out of genuine curiosity why that is a separation from section 3 and section 4 as well.

Yeah. Lots of questions in regard to this part about apprenticeship programs and specifically the board. I think that, again, to make sure that we have proper representation and that we're using the best experiential knowledge and wisdom that are accumulated from both the trades, from the trade leadership, from our polytechnics, from NAIT and SAIT, and that they have an active place in making decisions about what is being taught in the curriculum, what the standards are for professional practice, what the timelines are for training, and to ensure the integrity of an apprenticeship program, including the ability for apprentices to earn a wage while they are being trained as well – you know, again, I've heard conflicting things around how we should update and what the evolution of apprenticeship training programs is.

10:10

We need to make sure that whatever changes we're making, we are providing funding and backing to allow our apprentices and our polytechnics to pay for those changes and to support those changes. I don't ever doubt that we need to always support the continual evolution and development of education programs generally and curriculum specifically, to make sure we're in pace and in synchronization with industrial practices in other jurisdictions around the world, but we always have to aspire to the highest level. We cannot just sort of, perhaps, look for some mediocre middle to aim for but, rather, for the very, very best every step of the way.

Yeah. These are some of the things that my hon. colleague has built into this amendment, and I hope that each MLA here this evening will consider this in a constructive way to make the bill better for everyone. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Minister of Advanced Education has risen.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for his interjections and contributions to the debate on the bill. I apologize to the member opposite. I didn't get to catch all of his questions, but I did make some notes. If I don't get to them, perhaps one of his colleagues or someone else in part of the debate can fill me in. I'd be happy to address them.

Ms Sweet: Here to help.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Here to help. Good.

Perhaps I'll just jump in on the one part. The member was speaking specifically around section 3 and some questions around the separation between training that includes classroom instruction and training that does not, that falls into the categorization of on-

the-job training. This is actually a carry-over from the current AIT Act. The AIT Act does provide flexibility for employers to provide very specific and nuanced training programs that meet their very particular needs, so this isn't a new creation. This is actually a carry-over of legislative provisions that exist within the current AIT Act. It does provide for and give that flexibility to make that separation between instruction that occurs in the classroom and instruction that occurs in on-the-job training. Again, it's usually for very nuanced and specific instances where an employer needs to create some very nuanced on-the-job training.

Apart from that, just coming quickly back to the amendment that we have in front of us regarding the composition of the board, unfortunately I'm going to have to encourage my colleagues and other members of the House to vote against the amendment. The reason for that, Mr. Chair, is just that the amendment that the member has brought forward on behalf of his colleague is simply too prescriptive, and this is one of the challenges that we're trying to address in the development of the new bill.

I'll take the opportunity to remind all members of the House that the foundations for this piece of legislation come from the recommendations of the Skills for Jobs Task Force. Rewind to 2019. We convened a panel of experts, including postsecondary institution presidents, trade representatives, union leaders, and others, to conduct a very thorough assessment about the state of Alberta's trades and apprenticeship system, and that group provided their final report. Of course, that's available online for everyone to explore that report in more detail. The task force, apart from their own analysis that they did, also engaged in extensive consultation with apprentices, with journeypersons, with unions, with postsecondary institutions. Again, all of that information is contained in their report, that you can explore.

But one of the things – just quickly, Mr. Chair. Again, a lot of their recommendations are the conceptual foundations and underpinnings for this legislation. That's why we built the legislation the way that we did, because it was based on the advice, guidance, and recommendations of this expert panel. One of the things that they did comment – and, again, if you don't believe me, you can pull up the report and have a look at it. One of the things that they mentioned over and over again in the report was the need to look at the development of a modern governance framework. They noted very specifically around – they made comments to challenges around structural rigidity, challenges around a governance framework that isn't very flexible. In order for us to ensure that we have a nimble, responsive, and adaptable trades system for the benefit of all of our skilled trades professionals and, subsequently, our incredible province, it's essential that we have a legislative framework that allows us to operate in a nimble and responsive way.

Currently under the AIT Act the board composition is incredibly prescriptive, which is why in the draft bill that we have before the Assembly, we didn't take the approach of developing a very prescriptive criteria as to how many individuals should come from employers or employees, how many representatives should come from postsecondary institutions, but we wanted to ensure that we had some flexible options there. So that's my significant concern with the amendment, that it kind of takes us back to a very prescriptive approach to determining composition of the new board of trades, and I think that that would just continue to create problems for us and for the betterment of our apprenticeship system.

Again, I have to encourage members to reject this amendment. I'm not sure if the member opposite has other amendments or his colleagues have other amendments, but happy to look at those and debate those in more detail. But I can assure the member opposite

and others, of course, as we look at constituting the board, it's an absolute imperative and priority that employers are represented on the board, that postsecondary institutions and that representatives from the diverse community of Alberta's apprenticeship system more broadly are represented on the board. That's not the case today.

Currently, as it stands today, our postsecondary institutions – for example, our incredible polytechnics such as NAIT and SAIT and our other colleges that deliver apprenticeship and trades programming – don't actually have a seat at the table on our current AIT Board, which I think is problematic. We have to take steps to bring our stakeholders together, bring them to the same board, to the same committee, to the same table so that we can work on developing a much more integrated and cohesive ecosystem. Again, the benefits of doing that are clear as day. It helps to create a higher quality apprenticeship system and improves the outcomes more broadly for our province.

Actually, I'm just realizing I'm only answering one of the member's questions, that he had around section 3. I know he had some more, but I'm sure his colleagues will . . .

Ms Sweet: I'll ask again.

Mr. Nicolaidis: They'll ask some more, as my colleague is mentioning.

I'll just end there because I know there will be some more questions. I'm happy to address those at a later point, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to join on A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to this amendment. I thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing it forward, and I appreciate, first of all, the minister's willingness to rise and speak to, well, to some extent, what we're seeing in this amendment and to some other pieces, which I know we will have ample – well, I guess I don't want to guarantee that since I don't necessarily know, but I hope that we have ample opportunities to speak in committee to some of the other issues that the Member for Edmonton-North West brought up as well as the minister. I thank both of them for their contributions so far.

10:20

Now, you know, when we look at this, I would echo the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-North West. When we look at this legislation as a whole – and we'll get to the amendment in just one second, Mr. Chair – the government has told us that this is all good news, that it's essentially fully supported by stakeholders in the industry, whether they be educators, whether they be people that potentially make up some of the committees that we see within the industry that fall under the legislation, and whether we look at the union side of things the minister even brought up.

But the fact is that while we see pieces within this legislation that I can see myself supporting, you know, when we listen to the messaging from this government about the idea that we need to essentially value the contributions or value the education of those trades workers, those skilled trades workers, those apprentices and journeypersons within our communities and within our province that are working within the current system, again, Mr. Chair, I feel like, in many ways, this legislation contradicts that idea entirely.

I would say that in this section is a perfect example of where we're seeing that contradiction take place. Again, when we look at what's proposed in 13(2) on page 14 of Bill 67, we see that "the Minister shall designate one member as chair and one or more other

members to act” – oh, excuse me; I’m actually reading the wrong section. My apologies. We’re just adding this, Mr. Chair.

13(1) The Minister shall appoint a board to be known as the “Alberta Board of Skilled Trades” consisting of not more than 15 individuals who, in the opinion of the Minister . . .

And that’s where I start to struggle with what we’re seeing in this legislation, but I’ll continue.

. . . are knowledgeable with respect to the contribution of skilled trades professions to Alberta’s economic sectors and the needs of the Alberta labour market for skilled and trained individuals.

Now, I know that I can think back to several times that we’ve seen before this House where legislation is prescriptive in the fact that it becomes: “in the opinion of the Minister.” I think a very powerful example of that, which this government has done a complete one-eighty on, is through Bill 10. That, of course, was a much more powerful instance, where the minister gives themselves large amounts of power to make decisions. Now what we’re seeing here: again, the language of “in the opinion of the Minister,” taking the power away from what we currently have within the industry, which, I would say, strikes a more fair balance than what is being offered in section 13(1) on page 14 of this legislation.

This minister is telling us again, like we’ve seen in many other instances before this Legislature, that Albertans should simply trust the opinion of the minister. Now, it’s hard, again, Mr. Chair, to simply support or agree with the opinion of the minister. I think that while I can appreciate that the minister has said that the current wording of the legislation is too prescriptive, what we are proposing through this amendment is a much better, a much fairer balance than what is proposed within section 13(1) of Bill 67 as proposed.

Again, we look at the breakdown of what is offered in this amendment: “four individuals who represent employers of professionals in the designated trades” balanced by “four individuals who represent employees . . . in the designated trades.” It goes on to talk about “two individuals who represent employers of professionals in trades other than designated trades” and “two individuals who represent employees of professionals in trades other than designated trades.” Again, we’re looking at striking a balance between compulsory trade experience and, potentially, optional or designated trade experience, and we need to strike that balance. Unfortunately, throughout this legislation, which we’ll have more opportunities to speak to here this evening, I believe that we have not struck a proper balance. There are many questions left from stakeholders within the industry that are concerned about the decisions that this government is making through this legislation, the idea that we’re weakening the idea of compulsory trades, and question what we are going to see moving forward around education, around qualifications, around safety on the job sites, around training.

I mean, there’s a lot to digest in this legislation. Again, I appreciate that in some instances within Bill 67 I think we will be able to support certain pieces, but there is just so much that this minister is trying to change within the trades industry. Again, while the minister says that it’s the right decision in all aspects of this legislation to get people back to work – of course, that needs to be our number one priority – and ensuring the long-term viability of trades within our province, I simply do not see that throughout this legislation, and I do not see it specific to 13(1).

Again, on page 14 we talk about “the opinion of the Minister” and that minister’s ability to appoint not more than 15 individuals to this board who are, you know, “knowledgeable with respect to the contribution of skilled trades professions.” I mean, I question what that really means, Mr. Chair. Whether we’re talking to somebody on the street or somebody that works in the trade, I think their idea of what knowledgeable is with respect to the contribution

of skilled trades professionals – I think that if you asked somebody that’s on one of the current committees or boards compared to what the minister might believe is somebody that’s experienced in the trades and knowledgeable in the trades, that might even be different.

Again, we’re being asked to support the idea and the opinion of the minister when it comes to such an important aspect of the apprenticeship system, of the education system, of how that is delivered, potentially about the wages within the industry. There are so many things that are going to be left up to this board or have been in the past, potentially. Again, we’re seeing changes to what this board is going to be able to do compared to some of the past committees, depending on what changes have been there, another great concern of people within the industry. We’re being asked to just trust the minister. Too many times, Mr. Chair, we have put faith or Albertans have put faith in that minister, and I believe that through the consultation process again and again one thing is promised, one thing is committed to, and we see that in the end the results are much different than that consultation process promised or what was promised by that minister through that process.

It’s not hard, I believe, to question what this legislation is going to mean for the trades. I think that it’s important that we question that. I think that we’ve already seen hundreds of millions of dollars taken out of the postsecondary ministry or from our institutions across the province because of the decisions of this minister and the Minister of Finance. So we are very concerned, when we start talking about changing the composition of boards, about potentially changing how education rolls out.

You know, we look at and I had the opportunity to speak to the idea that currently you pay up front as an apprentice to go take these courses, and if you pass those courses, you get reimbursed. When we look through this legislation, I’m very concerned that that could potentially change, depending on if different institutions are offering this programming or, more specifically, if corporations on a larger scale become more able to provide that programming. The same goes for the potential to see things like unpaid internships even. I hope that the minister is willing to commit that we wouldn’t necessarily see something like that taking place, but the fact is that we have a system in Alberta where workers are able to get paid and earn credits towards those programs with on-the-job-site training, and I would hate to see major overhauls or major changes or even two sets of systems, depending on where you get your education from.

While that might not be specific to the amendment that’s before us, I think that the decisions that are going to be made by the Alberta board of skilled trades are important decisions on a wide variety of issues within the industry, and I think that it is important that we strike the right balance with the composition of this board specifically.

So while the minister talks about this being too prescriptive, I think that this is not something that should be left up to the minister’s decision, his opinion of who is and who isn’t knowledgeable within the industry. I think that we need to strike a right balance, and in our time in government I believe that we always did our best, when we were talking about making changes to boards, to strike the right balance between employers and employees. Again, this amendment leaves three seats open out of the 15 for the minister to have that opinion, but in no way, shape, or form, Mr. Chair, do I believe that the minister should have the opportunity to have an opinion on all 15 without any accountability to this House and to the legislation itself.

10:30

Mr. Chair, there are a lot more, many more, points that I am going to have the opportunity to, hopefully, speak to within Bill 67. I think

that, again, while there are certain pieces in here that I see myself being able to support in the hopes that it will strengthen our apprenticeship system, that it will strengthen the education system that we offer our apprentices, that it will create more opportunities within the job market for Albertans who are looking to become certified and qualified within these industries, the fact that we are muddying the waters around the idea of compulsory trades through this legislation, that we haven't been able to get a commitment or a willingness to strengthen the language within this legislation, that a lot of people within the industry are scratching their heads but more so are concerned about the prospects of what they might believe to be opportunities here for this government to try and drive down wages, to try and drive down educational opportunities for Albertans.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would encourage all members of the House to support the amendment as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I know that that member has spent an extensive amount of time consulting on these issues, not only in her role as the critic but in her role as the minister for this very important file. I know that these are conversations that were started back then and continue to this day and that we, again, need to do our best whenever we are looking at board composition or the idea of creating boards that are going to offer input on the apprenticeship system and the direction on the future of these systems, that we need to do everything we can to find balance. I simply do not believe that within Bill 67, as proposed by this minister, it strikes the right balance, and I hope that we will find support for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on amendment A1. I see the hon. Minister of Advanced Education has risen.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to respond to some of the questions and comments from the member opposite. I just want to address an important point – I referenced it earlier – in terms of how this bill came to be and, you know, what the foundations for this piece of legislation were. I'm not certain – the member opposite referenced, talked a little bit about conducting a consultation process and then having a different outcome from what was promised in the consultation process. I'm not really sure about that. Maybe the member can give some more specifics.

I'll read to you, if I can, Mr. Chair, right directly from the Skills for Jobs Task Force, which, again, was an expert panel of individuals we convened to evaluate the state of Alberta's apprenticeship system, provide recommendations to government about how to improve our apprenticeship system. They said, right here:

The fifth group of recommendations concerns governance and roles. Foremost, the Task Force recommends that the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act must be fully rewritten. It . . . no longer meets the current and emerging needs of Alberta. New legislation needs to be principles-based, nimble, and flexible. System roles need to be clarified and strengthened and governance models updated.

You can see exactly how we've taken that precise conclusion from a panel of experts, who, I believe, we can all agree know our apprenticeship system probably better than all of us, and how we've applied that in the development of this piece of legislation. Going back to a prescriptive model does not allow us to achieve the goals of being nimble, flexible, and adaptable. Furthermore, I understand that the member opposite has some concerns with the minister being able, as per the minister's discretion, to appoint the members of the board, but that's actually how it currently operates. There's

actually no change there, Mr. Chair, from the 30-year-old AIT Act. I'd encourage the member to have a look at section 2 of the current AIT Act. It reads as follows:

2(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council shall appoint a board . . . known as the "Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board" consisting of not more than 13 persons who, in the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, are knowledgeable with respect to training in trades and occupations and the needs of the Alberta labour market for skilled and trained persons.

So it's the exact same discretion, a minor adjustment, of course. The current AIT Act stipulates that the board appointment must be made through an order in council, must be made by the Lieutenant Governor. We found an opportunity to make that process a little more streamlined and reduce red tape by allowing that to be done through a ministerial order. But the fundamental power and discretion are still the same. There's actually no change. So I'm not sure why the member has concerns about that appointment process when that's the model we currently operate and the model that that member operated under when they were government. There's not a major deviation there in terms of determining who is knowledgeable.

Furthermore, just coming back to this amendment, looking a little closer, this amendment is actually copy-pasted right out of the old AIT Act. The AIT Act stipulates under subsection (2)(b), "4 members representing the interests of employers," et cetera, et cetera, exactly as is articulated here. What this amendment is proposing to do is take us back 30 years, back to the designation and the arrangement of the board as it's articulated in the old act, and we know through our panel of experts who have told us that this needs to be updated. We need to update it to build a more nimble and responsive system. Again, I don't know how going back is the right way to move forward and build a stronger apprenticeship system.

I just wanted to comment very briefly on those points. I know there'll perhaps be some more questions. Happy to address those as well.

Also, just very quickly, I believe the member made some comments about potential for, you know, unpaid apprenticeships and concerns around there. I mean, just to be clear, one of the foundational elements of an apprenticeship is that you have a job. That's a critical underlying element of an apprenticeship. You can't begin an apprenticeship if you don't have a job. So I'm not sure how unpaid internships would be involved in that equation.

But happy to address those points. Hopefully, I was able to provide some more clarity for the member opposite. I'm confident there'll be some more questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members looking to join on A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise and speak to the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I have been listening to the minister's comments tonight. Of course, as you probably heard, we're here to help, and we're here to ask more questions if needed to be asked. You know, as I was listening to some of his comments and the things that he was speaking about, he went through the amendment and what it is that we're asking to be put in place when it comes to the board. Now, the minister did make comments to say, "Well, this was in the old act" and that the government was told in consultation to update the act. Well, sure; some things maybe needed to be changed. Fair enough. But just because you can change an act

doesn't mean you need to change the whole thing all the time. There might be actually some good things that existed in the act before that could be moved forward into the new, updated amendment to the legislation.

You know, I think there's fairness in the fact that my colleague has gone back and said: "You know, this did work. This was something that made sense." It was equitable in the context that you had both representations of employers, representations of employees, both from the designated trades but also from professions within the designated trades. You have under all of these: four individuals who represent employers of professions in designated trades, four individuals who represent employees of professions in designated trades, two individuals who represent employers of professions in trades other than designated trades, and then two individuals who represent employees of professions in trades other than designated trades. Now, I appreciate that the minister also said, you know, when listing off what would be important to him on a panel: people from postsecondary – okay – diverse communities, absolutely, employers. What I did not hear the minister say was: employees or the working people. He may have missed that part. Again, I would like to remind the minister that when you're talking about trades, you might actually want to talk to the tradesmen or tradespeople that are working in those areas. This would do that.

10:40

Now, I think that when we look at the current definition of designated trade certificates that's found on the Alberta government website under their list of compulsory and optional certified trades, you will see under the definition of a compulsory certified trade that

to work in a compulsory [certified] trade, a person must either hold a recognized trade certificate or be a registered apprentice in the trade. An employer wishing to hire persons to work in the trade must hire only certified journeypersons in that trade or apprentices registered in the trade and working under the supervision of a certified journeyperson. Compulsory certification trades usually involve work where public and worker safety needs to be closely monitored.

It's on the website.

Given that it is explicitly here, when we're talking about the definition of compulsory certified trades, the question that I would have when we're looking at redesigning the board and looking at who would be represented on the board: if you don't have the working people and the voice of the working people, the very definition where it includes "where public and worker safety needs to be closely monitored" becomes a question mark because, as we know, when we're looking at trade work, occupational health and safety is paramount. We want to make sure that people that are working in these areas – of course, they're anything from service techs to autobody techs, boilermakers, elevator constructors, gas fitters, plumbers, hairstylists, heavy equipment techs, welders, all of these professions – have safety measures that need to be in place to ensure that not only those who are working on those sites but also the environments around those sites are always being kept to the safest standard possible.

Now, when we look at occupational health and safety committees, it's always been a recommendation from the opposition that we make sure that we have both employees and employers in those conversations because you want to ensure that there is a clear understanding from both sides of what that means when it comes to safety.

When we look at this and we hear from the minister that this is too prescriptive and, you know, that there needs to be more flexibility, well, okay. My question would then be: how do you

ensure, within the structure of the seats that exist, that there is going to be a fair representation of employers and employees from professional designation trades as well as employers and employees from trades other than designated trades? You have to have both voices.

Postsecondary? Sure. Diverse communities? Well, I mean, I would think that we could look at making sure the voices of diverse communities are both employers and employees. But when you're discussing looking at a structure of a board that's going to be addressing some of these very issues, and looking at the definition, you want to make sure that you have voices that are going to represent all of the issues.

Again, I think that if we even look at the optional certification trades, an employee working in an optional certification trade and learning the trade must become a registered apprentice if that employee is to work in the trade.

An individual is permitted to work in an optional certification trade if the employer deems the individual to have the skills and knowledge expected of a certified [journeyman] in the trade. Employers may employ uncertified [journeymen] and . . . uncertified journeypersons to supervise and train apprentices on the job.

Again, this is why it's so important that you have both the employer and the employee, because you are actually asking, an employer would be asking, an employee to be responsible for the supervision of anyone who may be considered an uncertified journeyperson. What does that look like? Well, I'm sure those will be discussions that would happen at this board. Again, how do you ensure that the expectations of both the employer and the employee are being met so that the workplace and the relationships between those who are educating and training our new tradespeople have the understanding, the knowledge to be able to do that? That can't happen if both voices aren't sitting at the board. If there are tools that are needed, if there's feedback on changes to curriculum that may need to happen, an employer may have a definition or an understanding of a change to a curriculum that makes sense to them. It may be then put into practice by a journeyperson, who might be, like: whoa; this isn't going to work; I can't implement it the way that you're asking me to and feel like I am actually training someone to have the skills that they will need to have when they move forward in their career.

I just think there's fairness in this conversation. If the minister feels that this is too prescriptive, my question would be: how is he, the government going to ensure confidence to those working in the trades, those employing people within the trades, the relationship with the postsecondary institutions that all voices are going to heard in collaboration, that the issues that are being addressed even within the definition of these trades are going to be met and that also these definitions aren't going to change, that the requirement around public safety and worker safety is not going to magically disappear? I think that that's a conversation that could potentially happen at this board. If we don't have both employers and employees talking and being represented, then there needs to be some guarantee and transparency around what this board structure will look like.

I would really appreciate if the minister could maybe answer some of those questions in relation to: if it won't be designed this way, where will the accountability and the reporting of this information be provided to the public to ensure that they know that both employers' and employees' voices are being heard in the designated and nondesignated trades?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I see the hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you again, Mr. Chair. Of course, it's incredibly important that we have the voice of employers and employees. They're all incredibly important elements of our apprenticeship system. As we build out the rest of the governance framework, there'll be many opportunities to ensure that we build a strong ecosystem. Apart from the board, we also have to look at the development of other committees that the new bill will be replacing and building those committees in a new way that will help ensure that those different voices are represented and are included, and we need to ensure that those voices have accurate representation so that we can build the strongest possible apprenticeship system. There's no intention – and this isn't desired – to try and cut anybody out of the process and not have their voice heard.

We already went through a process through the expert panel of consulting extensively on getting this far. We still have a lot more work to do because we have a lot to define through regulation in terms, including the governance structure. Yes, we have a board, but what other subcommittees, regional committees will be included as part of that governance framework? We're going to be reaching out to our stakeholders, to members currently on committees, to employers and employees to understand how we should build that framework and ensure that their voices are at the table. Absolutely, we do want to make sure that those voices are heard and will be ensured to develop the right governance framework and model so that all those voices are accurately represented.

I agree with the member. The member mentioned earlier, you know, that there are some good provisions. I talked about the 30-year-old act. There are some good provisions that should carry over. Yeah, absolutely, I fully agree. There are many instances where we've done that. I mentioned one earlier about the power and authority of the minister or, in the old legislation, the Lieutenant Governor to appoint the board. We've kind of copied that word for word. Other enforcement measures we've carried over. We built upon the strengths.

10:50

But one area where it clearly didn't work was around the governance, where we do need to make some changes, and that's why, again, this amendment is problematic, because it's just going right back to what is currently in the AIT Act. That's not going to help. Unfortunately, I lost my bookmark on the Skills for Jobs Task Force; I know the member opposite is probably very disappointed. But there are many sections – and I'll find them at a future point and point them out for her – where they talk at length about the governance model, about the structural challenges, the framework that's too rigid, and the need to build a nimble and flexible system. They talk about that at length, not just once or twice but multiple times throughout the report.

We have to take their advice. They're the experts. They know the system better than I do and, again, I would argue, perhaps better than many of us here. They're on the ground. They are the unions, the employers, the postsecondary professionals. They know the system, and they have commented, again, extensively and come to a conclusion in their report that the governance framework, very specifically the governance framework, is too rigid and needs to be much more nimble, to be adaptable and flexible to help us as a society and as a province respond to changing economic conditions, changing labour market needs and demands and, furthermore, take our apprenticeship system to the next level.

Within this legislation it gives us the ability to do something very innovative that I don't believe any other province in Canada is currently exploring and looking at, which is the potential to grow

new apprenticeships, to look at occupations like perhaps coding or cybersecurity or banking – I believe the sky is the limit here – and educate and train Albertans into those careers, into those new and emerging careers and fields through an apprenticeship-style system whereby you learn that trade and those skills by working, supplemented, of course, by academic training.

From what I understand, other provinces are looking at this. I actually just the other day had an opportunity to talk to one of my counterparts in Ontario, who was incredibly intrigued by what we are doing within the context of expanding apprenticeships. We need to make sure that we are looking forward and that we build an apprenticeship system that, yes, will satisfy the needs and demands of our society today but also gives us the opportunity to create modern and new apprenticeships as well. I do truly believe that there is great opportunity to create an environment where more Albertans can receive a postsecondary credential and be trained for specific occupations through an apprenticeship model of delivery. I think there's incredible potential, and I think all members would agree.

That's why I have serious concerns with this amendment. Why would we go back to a governance model that a panel of experts has told us is too rigid, doesn't allow us to be nimble, and needs significant updating and needs an environment that provides flexibility? Again, the members opposite can reject my point of view, and that's totally fine, but I encourage them to look at the point of view of the experts that reviewed this. Again, that included postsecondary presidents, union members, employers, employees, quite a diverse panel that we struck to develop that.

I'm happy to respond to those questions, and again I'm sure there'll be some more later on. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

We are on A1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 67, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, and in particular amendment A1. Just to clarify again what we are talking about with amendment A1, we are proposing to return a section which lays out eight of a larger number of members, in this case an expanded number of 15 that the minister has laid out, that we identify a few particular groups that have a stake in this to ensure that they are represented on that board. That's the amendment that we're bringing forward after the minister has removed that.

Now, the minister has spoken several times about the report from the Skills for Jobs Task Force, and he points to that to say that that is his justification because the previous legislation, he said, was too prescriptive, specifically talking about this board, what we're talking about here. The minister is saying that what the panel said – being too prescriptive, not being nimble enough, not being flexible enough – applies specifically to this board. Now, what we actually see in the report is that they talk about the act as a whole. They do in fact, as the minister noted, state “that the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act must be fully rewritten. It is anachronistic and no longer meets the current and emerging needs” of Albertans. Fair enough. So the minister has brought new legislation. We don't have a disagreement with that.

They go on to say that the “new legislation needs to be principles-based, nimble, and flexible,” again speaking about the legislation as a whole. Speaking about it as a whole. They also then, I would note, directly after that sentence state that the “system roles need to be clarified and strengthened” – the roles: who's operating within that system, who holds positions, who has what power; fair enough

– “and the governance models updated.” Now, the governance model, to be clear, Mr. Chair, is the framework, again, who is in charge of what, so the different boards, bodies, people that occupy that. The minister has introduced a new governance model. He has taken away the AIT Board, and he has replaced it with his new board. That is the governance model. That is the governance system.

Now, who sits on that board is not the governance model. Those are the governors. Those are the people that do the work. What the panel was talking about is the system, the bodies, who is going to occupy what, again, in terms of the larger framework. They do not, to the best of my reading, unless the minister can correct me, at any point actually address the members who occupy those seats. I have been unable so far to find anywhere in the report where they specifically identify to say: we need to make sure the minister has more flexibility about who he appoints to the board; it’s too prescriptive; he does not have enough choice.

There is a significant difference, Mr. Chair, between being nimble and flexible with some reasonable clarity and some checks and balances and having entire carte blanche. As a musician, someone who studied jazz and improvisation and who’s had the opportunity to work with many, many people in the creative arts, I can assure the minister it is entirely possible to be nimble and flexible within basic boundaries. One does not have to be completely unfettered in an open field with absolutely nothing putting any boundaries or constrictions on you to be nimble and flexible. Indeed, some of the most creative people, some of the greatest geniuses are people that know how to work in systems. Albert Einstein, a brilliant physicist and mathematician: yeah, he actually came up with some new rules and stuff in physics, but he actually knew how to work within the formulas and the boundaries, and he was incredibly nimble and flexible.

I do not buy this minister’s argument that having some basic requirements for eight members of a board of 15 is too prescriptive, that it somehow keeps him from being able, makes sure he’s unable, to actually do the work that needs to be done to create a board. Again, he’s already defined the governance system here, as recommended. He’s rebuilding it as was recommended here by the report, but we’re talking now about the individuals that sit on that board.

He talked about building committees in a new way, making sure those voices are having representation but not wanting, Mr. Chair, any way to actually guarantee which voices are going to be heard. He talks about those structural challenges, those governance issues. He talks about: well, we have to be able to adapt to a changing economy, changing apprenticeship systems. I cannot imagine any future economy that will not have employers and employees, two simple categories. You may change many things about the apprenticeship – unless this minister is not, in fact, a fan of the capitalist system, we are going to continue to have employers and employees. To have it in the legislation, to make sure that that representation is going to be there at the table, that representation which the minister himself has stated needs to be heard – he said that is essential, yet he balks at a simple requirement that out of 15 people at that board, we simply have four individuals who represent employers, professionals in the designated trades, and again that’s open for definition. That can flex an awful lot with the changing apprenticeship system, Mr. Chair: four individuals that represent employees of professionals in designated trades, then two individuals, employers of professionals in trades other than designated, and two that represent the employees in trades other than designated.

11:00

Those are all things that I think we are all going to recognize are going to continue to exist regardless of what changes happen, what evolutions happen, what new innovations come within the trades and apprenticeship system. There will still be employees and employers. According to the minister there are still going to be designated trades of some sort, and there may be nondesignated trades. Unless there is some other massive transformation coming here that the minister is not telling us about, I don’t see how these categories line up as being too prescriptive, particularly when the minister still gets to appoint seven other members of this board that he has established with 15 members from wherever he likes. But this minister, Mr. Chair, is not satisfied with that. He insists that he should be able to appoint all 15 members regardless of any consideration, without restriction, without any checks and balances on behalf of the people of Alberta. I fundamentally do disagree with him on that given that what we are seeing here, basically, is that they are saying that we have to put full trust in the minister, in his judgment alone, to make the determination of who should be represented here, particularly given that we have seen how poor the judgment of a minister of the Crown can be.

We’ve had many examples just recently. We have, for example, a Health minister who apparently either doesn’t understand or was unwilling to follow the public health restrictions that he is, in fact, largely responsible for. That is the judgment of a current minister of the Crown. We have a Minister of Environment and Parks who rescinded the long-standing protection for the eastern slopes to throw open the doors for coal mining against the wishes of Albertans. Indeed, that’s a minister, again, who is required to do consultation to understand and did not do so, having to backtrack rather badly on that now. Again, in this situation we are saying that we have a minister who is saying that he must be given unfettered, unrestricted control, yet we know that we have seen such poor judgment. Indeed, the Minister of Environment and Parks also seemed to fail to understand the public health restrictions that his cabinet chose to put in place, the cabinet which he is part of.

Again, talking about this bill, Bill 67, and the minister’s contention that we must entirely trust his and only his judgment despite the clear stakeholders that are in place in regard to who should sit on this board: we have a Minister of Finance, speaking of bad judgment, who fails to understand the principle of maximizing returns and tracking the actual results in terms of investing not only the pensions of Alberta’s teachers but potentially the pension investments of all Albertans; and, of course, a Minister of Advanced Education, who we’re speaking of now, who contends that he should be given sole discretion in regard to the makeup of this board, who is doing incredible damage to our province’s advanced education system, and indeed, if I recall correctly, was one of the first to make sweeping changes to the boards of governors in the province with little to no notice for many of the members that were currently sitting there at the time that this government came in.

That aside, I imagine my perceptions of the trustworthiness and, certainly, the level of judgment of ministers of this government probably differs from the minister himself and members of the government though, certainly, there have been a number of government members lately, or caucus members anyway, who’ve expressed their own concerns about the judgment of their ministers.

Again returning simply to what we have here, the contention that the minister is making: I do not see in the pieces that he is quoting from this report that they are referring specifically to the makeup of this board, and that is because, Mr. Chair, they are not. They are

talking about the larger concern with the legislation. They are talking about the larger concerns with the entire governance model and system. But I think they are quite clear about who has a stake in this situation.

They note specifically in the report that the AIT Board is “responsible for setting entrance requirements for apprenticeship education as well as credit recognition.” They note that there is a “network of provincial and local industry committees . . . [that] support the development of these standards” and that the purpose of the board is to provide “recommendations to government on education and certification standards for designated trade professions.” Again, Mr. Chair, in what situation would you not want to ensure that you have employers of professionals in the designated trades providing recommendations to government on the education and certification standards for those designated trades or the employees who will be affected by that, who themselves are participating in and affected by that system, and since we are looking at the expansion of this, then, doing the same for the employers and employees of professionals in trades other than the designated trades?

But the minister insists that he must have the flexibility to potentially appoint none of those, that it is too restrictive to give Albertans the assurance that whatever minister sits in that seat either now or in the future, we’ll always ensure that we have the key stakeholders who are involved in the system, who are impacted by this system, who are tasked with operating this system at the key table for the board that provides these recommendations to the government.

For that reason, I am in support of this amendment. It is not overly restrictive. If the minister finds that it does not allow him to be nimble enough, perhaps he needs to get some better dance lessons.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing – I see that the hon. Minister of Advanced Education has risen.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I didn’t catch the last part. I think the member commented that I might need better dancing shoes. If that’s what he said, he’s right. I have terrible dancing shoes. If he has any recommendations, it’s been a while. I appreciate his comments, but I do disagree with most of them, unfortunately.

An Hon. Member: Tell us what you agree with.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. I’ll be happy to tell you what I agree with. What I do agree with is, you know, what the member said, which is that it’s important that the different stakeholders that are involved in our apprenticeship ecosystem are at the table. That’s the driving motivation behind making these changes, because as I mentioned earlier, you know, the member commented that we need to make sure that all stakeholders are at the table. But this amendment doesn’t even accomplish that.

It doesn’t detail that there should be representation, for example, by our postsecondary institutions. It doesn’t detail, you know, other important stakeholders, nonprofit groups that deliver preapprenticeship training, or other on-the-job-site training providers and other groups are not included as part of this. Unfortunately, the member has just been very prescriptive about saying: “Only these people. Then anybody else that you want to appoint, that’s fine, but these people must be there.” I mean, why not employ that in a different circumstance and say that, well, our postsecondary institutions that are delivering the education must be

there, and then, you know, anybody else that the minister or government wants to appoint can also be included?

I mean, this amendment, again, doesn’t accomplish – if the goal is to ensure that all stakeholders are at the table, this amendment doesn’t accomplish that. It’s important that we in the board have that flexibility. You know, the players may change; we need a dynamic model. We need to be able to do that. If we wanted to make any changes, we have to come back and open up the legislation, which we know is a very difficult and lengthy and time-consuming process, to make some changes to the governance model, and that doesn’t help us to achieve the goal that the task force noted, of creating a nimble and responsive system.

11:10

Now, I mean, perhaps it’s up to a degree of interpretation. You know, the member talked about: well, that’s the governance framework that they’re talking about that needs to be nimble. Maybe he sees that as excluding the board, but the board, in my view, is a central part of that governance framework. It’s a critical part. When the committee, when the panel, when the task force talks at length about the governance framework and the need to modernize it and make it more nimble and adaptable, again, in my mind, that includes the board, and that includes the entire framework, from the board to the 160-plus local committees and provincial committees and the whole structure.

I just lost my place here, but I think I’ll find it. Here it is again. In section 5 on page 36 of the task force report, where they go into a lot more detail, they note specifically, “This provides an opportunity.” Excuse me; I’ll go back a sentence. “The Act, and accompanying regulations, needs to be fully rewritten. This provides an opportunity to modernize [our] system roles and governance models” – we might disagree what governance models mean; I interpret that to include the board, which is a critical part of the governance – “that will reduce red tape and improve flexibility and nimbleness.”

Again, it’s very clear what the task force, what the panel is looking for in terms of if we want to take a principle-based approach in the development of the new legislation. It’s very clear what they’re looking for. Let’s apply that lens to the board, to the other pieces that we’re going to detail in the legislation because that’s the philosophy that they’re coming from. Let’s apply that philosophical lens to the development of the legislation.

I don’t know how being very prescriptive about who should be on the board meets those fundamental conceptual underpinnings of being flexible and nimble, so again I’m just going to have to disagree with the member there. Absolutely, as we develop the board, as we develop the rest of the governance model – I should comment that when we get to that stage, should the legislation be passed, it’s not something that we’ll be, you know, developing in any kind of isolation but through extensive consultation and feedback, as we’ve done to get to this stage and as we’ve done with other efforts – when we get to that point and look at the development of additional committees, subcommittees, the composition of the board, engaging extensively with our stakeholders within our apprenticeship system will be essential and will be done to ensure that we build the strongest possible governance framework here.

I’m sure the member opposite and others will continue to have, you know, comments as we go through that process and we look at the development of the regulations and the entire framework, about how to best structure it. I’m very hopeful that they’ll be active participants in that process so that we can create the strongest possible system, because I think that when we come together and share best practices and ideas, we can create the best possible

outcome. I'm sure there'll be some more questions, and I'm happy to answer those as well, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment. I believe I've spoken to this bill once, but I am very interested in speaking to this bill. I'll start off. The great freedom of Committee of the Whole is that members can get up multiple times to speak, so really this is my favourite step in legislating a bill, in that true debate can occur.

I'm going to start off, Mr. Chair, by thanking the Minister of Advanced Education for actively engaging in debate this evening. Again, I will always give credit where credit is due. I know that's not necessarily the approach that all of the minister's colleagues take. The fact that the Minister of Advanced Education is engaging and getting up and speaking after every single member of the opposition comments is noted, and I'm sure that Albertans are noting it as well.

I will talk about and I know colleagues of mine have mentioned aspects of this bill – and I know we're speaking to the amendment, Mr. Chair – that we do support, because there are many elements of this bill that the opposition supports. The purpose of this amendment, like all amendments that we put forward, is to try to strengthen the bill and enhance the bill and ensure that, again, there is an additional lens that is put on every piece of legislation, acting and looking at it in the best interests of Albertans.

You know, one of the aspects that I really enjoy about this bill, Mr. Chair, is the fact that we're talking about enhancing that experiential education component of our education system. Whether we're in traditional universities or trades schools like NAIT and SAIT, I think experiential education is absolutely critical. In fact, I can tell you that when I went through university, taking my bachelor of education, the most useful components that I found, the most practical components were the practicums. It's important to learn theory. I'm not trying to run that down whatsoever. But on-the-job experience: there is no replication for it. That is the best experience.

In fact, I think every single member of this Chamber will tell you, Mr. Chair – and we all come from a varied background – that there is no single job that can prepare an MLA for the job of MLA. It is probably one of the most unique and fascinating jobs that any of us will ever hold, unreplicated, quite frankly. That's one of the things I love about this job. Members gain experience and gain expertise through the act of doing it.

The fact that this bill is looking at opening up these opportunities for experiential education into sectors and areas that have not necessarily traditionally encouraged or have had a practical component to it, I agree with, I applaud. I think that's fantastic, and I'm happy to see the province moving in that direction.

Speaking to this amendment now, Mr. Chair, I appreciate the minister's comments on it being too prescriptive, but I'm going to disagree with the minister. I think what needs to be differentiated is looking at ensuring that there is balance on a board of governors with the abilities and actions that that board can take. Nowhere in this amendment are we proposing to restrict decisions the board is making, programs that they're going to put forward, or changes to any part of the postsecondary system. If we were proposing that, I agree with the minister that we are now putting restrictions on the board of governors, and we're restricting their mobility; we're restricting their decision-making abilities. We would then be causing them to be less flexible. What we are proposing is to ensure

that there is balance, that there is balance on the board and that certain stakeholders are represented.

You know, Mr. Chair, I don't doubt the minister's integrity, and I'll take the minister at his word. The problem I have is that this minister is part of a government that has lost the trust of Albertans, and every week there is a new example of why Albertans should not trust this government. It's quite shocking, actually. Really, I mean, my opinion on the government's performance is not relevant, but I can tell you that me echoing the sentiments of my constituents, my 40,000 constituents in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, is relevant.

11:20

Now, Mr. Chair, this government has given Albertans reason after reason to not trust them, most recently the sky palace dinner, the sky dinner, whatever the reporters are now calling it. Today, at least, was a half apology from the Premier, walking it back but not entirely, of course, because it's always someone else's fault and someone else is to blame for it, but the fact of the matter is that on Thursday in this very place the Premier was arguing something completely different than what he said today.

We have examples of the increase in personal income taxes, where this government campaigned on not increasing taxes and then increased taxes. Now, members will tell me: oh, no, no, no; removing the bracket is not increasing taxes. I encourage the members to read their leader's comments when he was head of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, who spoke at length about bracket creep and how that is increasing personal income taxes, yet somehow 20 years later he becomes the Premier of Alberta and suddenly that's not increasing personal income taxes. Was he not telling the truth then?

We have other examples of slapping on parks fees, trying to allow mining of the eastern slopes. We have a tax on health care and doctors and nurses and front-line workers, a tax on our education system. The problem with the bill as it's currently written, Mr. Chair, is that I don't and we don't and Albertans don't trust this government.

This amendment is proposing that there are members of employers and members of the designated trades which this affects, this piece of legislation. What we're saying is: allow the very people who you are impacting – you're changing their profession. They should be allowed to be at the table. The reality, Mr. Chair, is that as it's currently written, the Minister of Advanced Education could appoint this whole board, and there could be not a single person from the trades, who this board will create policy around, represented, or it will not have a fair representation. Sure, the minister may have a token individual on a board and say, "Look, I checked the box; there is a person from the designated trades that we are impacting who is on this board," but they will be, sadly, outnumbered.

The arguments the minister puts forward on a flexible system: we're talking about the issue of board governance and who is on the board. That does not restrict flexibility. What it does is that it removes the ability of the minister to stack the board with either special-interest groups or whoever he sees fit. Now, I can remind the minister, who may say: "I would never do that. No, of course not. We don't have any examples in Alberta." Oh, wait a minute: AMVIC. Before we formed government, there were a number of boards that were buddies or donors or party loyalists who were appointed, not a meritocracy. I believe in a meritocracy.

I believe that the people that should be appointed to this board should ensure that there is diversity to counter groupthink. For anybody who wants to argue with me on that, I can pull up a number of papers that talk about the fact that companies that have a diverse

board of governors and a diverse executive C-suite perform better. They have stronger financials. It's not even about the social issue. Let's just talk economics. They do better than boards that are homogeneous. In fact, you'll find fewer and fewer companies that are comprised of that type of board because they're falling behind, quite frankly.

What we're talking about here is to ensure that there is adequate representation from a variety of groups. There need to be employers at the table, absolutely. There needs to be postsecondary representation, absolutely. We need to ensure that workers are there a hundred per cent. This amendment still gives the minister, I would argue, quite a bit of flexibility. When we talk about four individuals from employers of these trades, we didn't say which trades and how many employers and which companies. That would be restrictive. Employers of the trades is huge. We're talking about thousands if not tens of thousands of different companies in Alberta. When we talk about individuals that represent employees, we never talked about a specific union. In fact, unions aren't even mentioned. We're talking about employees, whether they're unionized or non-unionized. We're just saying that the very people should be at the table.

What's frustrating is that we saw the example of this when the government put together their group of who wrote their curriculum. Where were the teachers in writing the curriculum? The very experts who know better than anyone were not at the table. This amendment, Mr. Chair, ensures that employees are at the table. The rest of it I encourage the minister to look at. We're talking about a couple of individuals who represent employers outside of the trades. Let's talk to employers that don't have a current stake in the game. Now, we're talking about companies maybe that are in the artificial intelligence space or in the machine learning space. We're going outside of your traditional trades. I believe they need to be there a hundred per cent. Then we're talking about employees that are not working for companies within the trades. This amendment is not overly prescriptive. It's ensuring there's balance.

It goes back to my main argument, Mr. Chair. If the government actually had built trust with Albertans when it comes to consultations or how boards are compromised – or comprised; pardon me . . .

An Hon. Member: Either one.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah, well.

. . . then Albertans would have more trust in them. What the opposition is doing is putting forward an amendment that at least puts a broad set of parameters around who should be at the table. I would tell the minister that companies do the same thing when they're looking at board members. They want to ensure that there is diversity. They're looking for: what are the skills missing from the current composition of the board? Tell me where in the private sector, first of all, a CEO appoints the board and, second of all, appoints the whole board. What we are trying to do, Mr. Chair, is ensure that we have broad representation. Parameters are not a bad thing.

Again, you know, we can debate back and forth on the definition of prescriptive, but the amendment – I feel that Albertans would argue that this still provides flexibility for the minister to be able to appoint members of the board to ensure that we have broad diversity, that we have experts from postsecondaries, from industry, from the trades themselves, from outside of the trades, from outside of the current definition of trades within the industry to move this forward. This does not restrict innovation or flexibility. Those are great speaking points for the minister to ensure that he is the sole person who is going to hand-pick this board.

I could talk all day about this and all night, Mr. Speaker, but I think that the members of the Chamber have understood my points. For that reason, I will encourage all members to vote in favour of this amendment.

11:30

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: I'll be quick; I promise. I'll be really quick. I don't disagree with a lot of what the member said, just certain parts of it, of course. We'll get off talking about having a nimble system. You know, we've talked about that at length. I agree with him. We need to ensure broad representation, but this doesn't accomplish that. This amendment doesn't accomplish broad representation. There are so many other stakeholders that are critical to our apprenticeship system that are not included here. The amendment is just looking at ensuring that specific representation is there, not broad representation. If you include postsecondary institutions, other key players, then you have an amendment that's actually talking about broad representation. But not here, so serious concerns there.

As well, he talked about machine learning and AI and having employers or employees from those professions potentially being here, but again this doesn't allow that because you're limited to only trades. You're saying: designated trades and nondesignated trades. If you create an apprenticeship, it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to designate it as a trade. If you wanted to have those individuals, you still wouldn't be able to under this context because you've said: designated trades or nondesignated trades. You still have three spots, so you need to include postsecondary institutions, other key stakeholders, and then other groups. You really limit yourself here. Again, I don't think that this will help accomplish that.

Lastly, because I know that the member wants to move on, the member talked about stacking the board with special-interest groups. What kind of special-interest groups are you going to stack on this board? Like, postsecondary institutions, employers, employees, apprentices? I don't understand. I mean, if the accusation is that you're just going to appoint a whole bunch of – I don't know – UCP insiders or loyalists or something like that, that's a criticism that maybe they can make. But you don't change that with this amendment because I could still do that with this amendment; it doesn't actually address the issue.

An Hon. Member: But you won't.

Mr. Nicolaides: But I won't, of course, because we want to make sure that we have a board that is representative of our apprenticeship system. Not sure it gets there. Again, what are the special interests in an apprenticeship system that we're going to appoint to the board? Too many postsecondary institutions at the table? Too many apprentices? I don't know.

Anyway, I'll finish there. I promise that I'm done, and over to the House leader. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 67.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 67. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 65

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 65? I believe that is what was read off there. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre caught my eye.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: Oh. I called Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Sorry.

The Acting Speaker: That's okay.

Mr. Eggen: You go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Are we on Bill 65?

The Acting Speaker: We are on Bill 65. That was what was called by the table. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 65 as that is apparently the direction that we are taking at this time. Now, Bill 65, of course, is the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, and recognizing that we have some particular changes that are being made through this legislation by the government. [interjection] We seem to have some discussion of that on the floor at the moment. But regarding this particular bill, we have some basic changes that are being made by the government to a few different pieces of health legislation: the Pharmacy and Drug Act, the Health Professions Act, the Alberta Evidence Act, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act.

Now, the hon. Government House Leader rose earlier, and he moved third reading on behalf of the Minister of Health and had a few comments to make on that. When he moved third reading of Bill 65, he spoke of how it's important that despite the pandemic and the other challenges we face, the government continue their work to strengthen and modernize the health system to better protect, to serve Albertans, to meet the needs of Albertans. He talked about the feedback from valued stakeholders. Mr. Speaker, if this government's goal is in fact to strengthen and modernize the health system in Alberta, I would say that they are falling far, far short at this time. We only have to look to just what we have heard in recent weeks about the impact this government's decisions that this minister spoke of in terms of strengthening and modernizing

our health care system has had on the health care system in rural Alberta.

The county of St. Paul, Mr. Speaker, in the last week alone has lost one-third of its acute-care capacity. One-third of the acute-care beds in the county of St. Paul have been shuttered because this government, in its insistence on what it calls strengthening and modernizing the health care system in the midst of the pandemic, chose to continually act last and act least and pushed that health care system to the very brink, to the point where so many of our front-line health care workers, nurses in particular, are either isolating because of exposure to COVID or taking time off or have reached a point of such utter exhaustion that we do not have enough staff to maintain that system. One-third of the acute-care beds in St. Paul county shuttered.

At Elk Point, one of the sites where some of those beds have been shuttered also, now the emergency department does not have doctors two days a week because this government in their claim, as the minister was talking about in moving third reading of this bill, said that they are strengthening and modernizing the health system. That involved their war on doctors, which drove some out of province. Again, their choices on COVID-19 to continually act last and act least, exhausting those doctors, pushing those doctors and the health care system to the point where they do not have enough now to staff these emergency departments: that's what this government calls strengthening and modernizing the health system.

11:40

The Galahad continuing care centre, which the Minister of Health accused me of spreading false information about today by stating that the Galahad care centre is in fact closed, is closed. Eighteen seniors have been relocated to other communities. One couple separated formerly by 15 minutes are now separated by an hour's drive because this government again pushed our health care system to the limit, refused to act in time to control the spread of COVID-19, and again put the Galahad care centre in the position where they do not have enough nurses and health care aides to be able to continue to operate. That is not false information, Mr. Speaker. Those are the facts.

While the government may want to pat themselves on the back for making a few amendments here in Bill 65 and claim that they are doing a wonderful job of strengthening and modernizing the health care system by puttering about with some details at the edges, they are failing this system as a whole at incredible cost to Albertans, at an incredible loss of access to care in rural communities. Now, the minister, in moving third reading, talked about how he was proud of the work he had done, hearing feedback from valued stakeholders with the College of Pharmacy to greater empower that college, that professional body on behalf of the pharmacists of Alberta and the pharmacy owners, to empower them to be able to make changes without being dependent on government, to give them more freedom, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I will say that that is in stark contrast to the incredibly antagonistic and paternalistic manner in which this government has approached so many other health care professions, most notably doctors in the province of Alberta and certainly the Alberta Medical Association, who were treated with far from respect and indeed saw massive efforts from this government to vilify over the last year. Certainly, that has come around as this government has realized the damage that they have done and got a wake-up call when they couldn't even get through the last deal that was put forward in front of doctors because of the incredible damage that they did with the lack of respect, the lack of consultation, and trying to undermine them in every possible way.

So these changes that we have here for the College of Pharmacy to assist them in setting up their standards of practice: while we do not have any disagreement with those, certainly that is perhaps a model that this government should consider now as it tries to repair the relationship with Alberta's doctors. We continue to see those effects in a letter that I just recently posted on social media that I received from a woman in Calgary who is losing her family doctor at the end of August. He is moving to Ontario, so she and her family now will have to find a new physician. A number of people reached out to me after I posted that, Mr. Speaker, to say that they are in the same position, including my own colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West. She herself, her mother, and several folks are losing their doctor in Lethbridge. That is part of this government's work, apparently, to strengthen and modernize the health system in the province of Alberta, to take away people's access to primary care.

I think of the Cochrane primary care centre, where the entire place is shutting down, Mr. Speaker, the number of doctors that will be leaving, the hundreds, possibly thousands of patients who will have to be seeking new care in Cochrane or driving to Calgary now to see their doctors where they're moving. So as the government makes these changes now for working with the College of Pharmacy, they may well want to reconsider their approach with so many other health professions to try to minimize the damage that they have done to our provincial health care system and how that is affecting Albertans.

Now, in Bill 65 we also have some changes, then, to the Alberta Evidence Act, providing judges at fatality inquiries with access to information from health systems, in terms of quality assurance committees, to support more comprehensive reviews and better recommendations. Indeed, that again strikes me as reasonable, Mr. Speaker. It's an amendment that was recommended by two separate judges from all their inquiries, so that is the government doing the appropriate thing and listening to folks from within the system and making the changes. According to health officials it will in fact bring Alberta in line with the other major provinces.

I do not see any real concerns here though certainly I have had some considerable concerns with some of the other steps this government is taking, particularly in terms of health information. Indeed, we recall a bill not that long ago where the officer of the Legislature, Ms Jill Clayton, who is responsible for protecting the privacy of Albertans and their information raised serious concerns with an utter lack of consultation from the Minister of Health, who tried to claim otherwise, but Ms Clayton was quite clear that she and her office were not consulted. I'm certainly hoping that the minister has rectified that in the last little while. We haven't heard. The minister has been busy with a number of things, as we've heard about so often in the news of late. But, certainly, in this particular case it seems that there was at least a bit more due diligence done in terms of looking at giving that access to information to the health system in terms of the quality assurance under the Alberta Evidence Act.

Now, we have some further changes that are being put in place under the Crown's Right of Recovery Act, two consequential amendments, basically first adding a provision so that when the government joins an injured claimant's lawsuit that ultimately ends up being unsuccessful, then the government of Alberta is only responsible for paying the additional reasonable costs that are related directly to recovering the cost of health services provided to the injured claimant.

Now, I understand that this is the standard approach in both Ontario and British Columbia, so I do not at this time see serious issues with that particular approach here, certainly far less damaging than so many of the government's other moves over the last couple of years when it comes to insurance in the province of

Alberta. Certainly, every single Albertan with car insurance has seen the effects of that, this government's decision to remove the cap on the insurance that had been in place and basically allow *carte blanche*, so Albertans are paying far more even at a time when folks in other provinces are in fact seeing rebates and reductions. In the midst of COVID-19, when they were driving far less, Albertans are all paying more. It remains to be seen what further steps this government intends to take with auto insurance. But for the time being, here in this bill basically just allowing the government to recover some costs: in general I see no issue with that.

Second – now, this is one that we have talked about at some length; this was one concern that we had raised with this bill – they are removing the automatic fine that was in place for automobile insurers who fail to submit their annual premiums report to Treasury Board and Finance. Now, we had, I believe, brought forward some amendments to try to correct this and change this and put the system back in a way that would hold insurance companies accountable in the same way that average Albertans are held accountable for duly filing their paperwork on time. We had a lengthy conversation about why the Minister of Health felt that he needed to give the Minister of Finance that sole discretion on whether or not the fine should be applied.

Certainly, we've had a great discussion at great length tonight about giving sweeping powers to ministers, and of course we've got another bill in front of the House, Bill 66, which deals with another situation where this government chose to give itself far too great a sweeping power and again ignored a number of amendments that were brought forward by the opposition. Indeed, that led to an awful lot of time and money being burned setting that right.

11:50

In this particular case, basically we have yet to hear a clear articulation. Again, we've heard a positing of potential scenarios but certainly no explanation of a specific situation where this has occurred. The minister, as I recall, talked about: you know, well, sometimes there might be a fire; information is destroyed. I believe that we are in a day and age, Mr. Speaker, where you would be incredibly hard pressed to find, I think, an insurance company who does not have their data saved in multiple locations if not in the cloud. We are long past the days where the only records that exist are the boxes in the basement, so I fail to find that a convincing justification, but as I recall, that's the only one that the minister was really able to provide. I suppose that if we had a catastrophic scenario, say some sort of Terminatoresque situation where we had a global power outage – I'm forgetting the term now; there's a particular kind of bomb that puts out a magnetic pulse and destroys all electronics within a certain radius – then we might find that all records could potentially be destroyed. Perhaps such an apocalyptic scenario is what the Minister of Finance has in mind.

Ultimately, we find this piece here in this bill, despite the fact that it connects to Treasury Board and Finance because of the premiums that are collected and reported by Treasury Board and Finance, which are used by the Ministry of Health to determine the health premium that's charged on auto insurance packages, for which, as I noted earlier, all Albertans are currently now paying more – thank you to this government. That said, in general, that concern aside, there is really not anything in particular, I think, that we will end up objecting to specifically in this piece of legislation. It is certainly one of the less damaging ones that has been brought forward by this government, whether in this session, certainly in several previous.

I think that that more or less concludes my thoughts, Mr. Speaker, and I'll give others the opportunity to speak to third reading. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 65, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. I want to start by acknowledging all of the incredible front-line health care workers that are working so diligently to ensure that Albertans are getting the care that they need in the time of a pandemic. My deepest gratitude goes to those individuals that are tired, that are working and fighting this pandemic to keep us safe and to keep us healthy.

I think that it's fitting that we're in the Legislature tonight talking about health statutes. We know that this government, unfortunately, hasn't been doing what's necessary to make sure that health care in our province is moving forward and that it's actually meeting the needs of Albertans right now, in a time when so many Albertans are looking to our health care providers for that advice, you know, how to stay safe, how to make sure that we're doing the things that we need to do like getting vaccinations and those types of things.

We're very fortunate that we have a province with some passionate, passionate skilled physicians, nurses, yet when you talk to some of them, most of them, they don't feel that they're supported by this government. They feel that they've been attacked, quite frankly, and I think that when we're talking about legislation in this House, especially when it relates to health, those comments need to be brought forward. We're talking about people that take care of us, our front line in our health care system, who aren't feeling supported, who are exhausted, who are leaving this province.

There are so many people across this province that were already struggling to find a physician. That's a well-known fact, that in the province, in the country, trying to find enough health care providers has been a challenge. I know that when I sat at the table for Seamless Canada as the military liaison for the government, we sat with the provinces and the territories talking about health care, and it was a conversation that we were having about: how can we get more physicians to go into those areas of the province or the territories where they're underrepresented, where communities are travelling long distances to get health care? Then you put a pandemic in the mix, and we watched this government go after doctors. They weren't at the table talking about what the needs were.

I've had lengthy conversations with my doctor, who truly got into practising medicine because she cared, because she cared about people. She wanted to make a difference. She took an oath, and she feels that some of the decisions made by this government are actually impeding her ability to provide the care that she truly wants to provide to Albertans. She said that she sees students come through her practice who talk about graduating and leaving Alberta. They don't want to stay in this province when they don't feel that ethically they're able to practise the type of medicine that they want to practise.

Physicians don't want to have to close down emergency rooms. Physicians don't want to stop being able to provide Caesarean sections, but the decisions that this government has made and the lack of support have caused some of these heartbreaking decisions. We're hearing from doctors, we're hearing from nurses who aren't taking these decisions lightly. So many that have been here practising in this province their entire careers are leaving because they feel ethically that they're not able to provide the service of care that they took an oath to provide. They don't feel supported by their government.

So when we have pieces of legislation like Bill 65 coming forward – most of this is cleaning up things in the legislation, and it makes sense – what we're not seeing is the support that's so needed to support rural health care. We don't see anything that talks about fixing the fact that they fired 11,000 health care workers once the pandemic is over.

What we do know is that there's this feeling in the province, based on the decisions, that an American-style health care is coming. When we're in a pandemic and all of our resources and supports aren't going to our health care system, that's a concern. When we don't have doctors at the table who are part of the decisions about the legislation and the bills that are being brought forward, that's a problem. We know that COVID is here. We know that we need our physicians. We know that Albertans are struggling. The last thing they should be worrying about in a pandemic is: do they have access to health care? Do they have access to a doctor?

Mr. Speaker, those are things that in Alberta should be a given. It should be a guarantee that when you need a physician, you can access a doctor. As a mom of three, my firstborn was a Caesarean section. It is a scary time to know that you have to have a major surgery, and to know that I perhaps wouldn't have been able to access that in my home community with my doctor would have been terrifying. To know that when you're in labour, the decision has been made, while you're in the hospital, that a Caesarean section is needed but that the hospital can't provide that service so now you have to go somewhere else to continue labouring and have a Caesarean section is not okay.

12:00

Mr. Speaker, when we look at this legislation, there are some things that make sense. When we look at increasing the ability for pharmacists, I think that that is something that pharmacists have said, that they want this. Knowing that the Alberta College of Pharmacy is supportive of this is comforting, because all too often with this government we see legislation that's being brought forward without consultation, and we're hearing over and over and over that those that are being impacted by the legislation haven't had input into it. They haven't been at the table.

Being able to see here in Bill 65 that the Alberta College of Pharmacy is supportive of that is comforting. I don't know who this government consults with, often because they don't tell us, but what I do know is that so many come to us and say: we don't have a voice at the table. So seeing that the government is making a decision that is being supported by the College of Pharmacy is something where I can say: absolutely, that makes sense.

When we look at the impact for the Alberta Evidence Act – this piece of legislation actually has four different acts that are being impacted. The Alberta Evidence Act is another piece that I think is a decision that makes sense. It's been supported by judges coming forward and saying: this is something that we need. Again, knowing that there has been that consultation, that this has come from those that do the job and give direction for government, is comforting.

I wish I could say that for all of the legislation. When I'm standing here in this Chamber as a member of opposition, I want to be able to say to my constituents: this is what the government is proposing; this is what those impacted are saying about it. It's nice to see that there have been recommendations made to government and they're being acted on. I wish that was so with every piece of legislation.

When it comes to the Alberta Evidence Act, that piece of this, I think it makes sense. When we have health officials saying that this change brings Alberta in line with other major provinces, that's a

positive thing, and I appreciate that that is feedback that this government has listened to and is making that change.

The thing that is concerning about Bill 65 is the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. This speaks to the minister's ability to have discretion over whether or not to apply a fine. I heard the Member for Edmonton-City Centre give some examples of what could happen that would cause someone to be late in their filing, and they're extreme. We live in an age where we have access to documents; we have the ability to file things. And some of the examples we've heard in this Chamber are just so far stretched, about a what-if, that changing the legislation because of these one-offs just doesn't make sense.

Treasury Board and Finance gave an example of the chief financial officer of an insurance company unexpectedly dying right before the filing deadline. The chances of that happening: it could happen. But I would think that the insurance company would have a backup plan. They would have some sort of way to access documents, file documents. They're not going to completely shut down because their CFO died right before the filing deadline. They would have contingencies in place that would allow them to file.

So that example, to me, just doesn't make sense. It doesn't support why this minister would need more discretionary power to support insurance companies, that warrants this drastic change to the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. I know that when it comes to filing a claim, there are guidelines in place, and there are likely way more restrictive circumstances that would come in play for someone that's been in an accident to not meet that deadline, trauma being one of them, injury being another.

But I can't imagine that that timeline would be excused, and if an individual wanting to file a claim could apply to the minister to say, "Hey, could you exempt me?" with likely very legitimate reasons, I don't understand why the benefit would be given to the insurance companies when we're already seeing so many decisions that this government has made that favour insurance companies. We watched them bring in legislation that changes the ability for those that have been in an accident to make a claim. They've reduced concussion to a nonserious injury, which the science shows is absolutely not true. It is a brain injury, and it is significant, and it is serious. When we asked the government who they spoke to to make that decision, we didn't hear physicians, we didn't hear neurologists, and we didn't hear victims of concussions. It was likely insurance companies. This would benefit insurance companies. This is a piece of legislation in the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, that is again favouring insurance companies, not Albertans that are looking for support from their government when it comes to the health services that they rely on in this province. It's a piece of . . . [Ms Goehring's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to make quick comments or questions.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to just say a few more words in regard to Bill 65, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. You know, when I first saw this bill put onto the Order Paper, I thought: okay; here we go again, another part of this roller coaster ride that this UCP government has imposed on all of us here in the province in regard to making attacks on the integrity and the strength and the capacity of our public health system to serve Albertans now and for always.

You know, I found it particularly difficult to imagine how this UCP government would continue its attack on our public health system in the midst of a pandemic. I know that it was part of their plan to privatize and to shrink the ability of our public health system to meet the needs of our people, but I really didn't think that they would have the audacity to carry on with those attacks during an unprecedented health pandemic, that we've all had to live through here over the last year and a half.

You know, sure enough, we've seen in many sort of obvious or more surreptitious ways the continuation of the UCP's ideological attack on health care in the province of Alberta, an attack that puts us in a much more vulnerable position, regardless of if we're dealing with a pandemic or not, just to meet the needs of our population for health concerns and to help build the economic recovery that we all so desperately need and want here in the province.

12:10

You know, Mr. Speaker, having a strong foundational public health system is absolutely essential to meet that need we have for economic diversification here in the province of Alberta. It is a way by which you can build a foundational sense of trust and security that allows businesses to choose to start up and to thrive here in the province of Alberta. I don't think it's any coincidence that our success economically has been directly tied, over these last 50 years or more, with a concerted investment in public health care such that you have that economic advantage that a business has by having a healthy workforce, that you have the security of knowing that you and your family will be looked after in a medical emergency or in a chronic situation, and it reduces the expense overall for businesses and for individuals to carry on with their lives and to build their businesses and so forth.

We have to look no further than the United States, that spends at least 10 or 11 times more on health care in their country without any discernible better health outcomes. In fact, their life expectancy is considerably lower than Canada's, and you have incredibly unequal distribution of coverage and care in a place like that even though they're spending exponentially more money on health care to serve their population.

When I see people practically saying that, you know, we need more choice in our health care system, we need more of these opportunities for people to pay for procedures and so forth, it's not even becoming sort of a Trojan Horse anymore; it's more like driving a tank through our public health system and saying: "Hey, you know what? Here we are, the UCP, and we're going to build a private foundation for health care. What are you going to do about it?" almost in a challenging sort of way.

The latest evidence we've seen of that, again, just at the place where we're all looking for confidence and reinvestment in our public health system, is, you know, the appointment of Jack Mintz to Alberta Health Services, who has spent a great deal of his career trumpeting and promoting private health systems in his philosophy and being very blatant about not being surreptitious or trying to hide his interest and desire to have more private health care in any given system, and here he is on the very most important board, I would argue; giving a board membership to that very same person.

Forgive me for being a bit skeptical when I see a bill with the word "health" in it when it comes into this Chamber, but we are pretty good at analyzing them and making sure that they're not going to contribute to this agenda of privatization. You know, I guess there's sort of a mixed bag in Bill 65. I must say that some of the individual sections were things that were necessary to be done and, in fact, legally necessary because of errors and the problems that the government stumbled into in the first months of their

governance of our health system in the province. There are a few areas in this bill that have some logical sort of element to them, I suppose, that could provide some benefit, right?

The part that I would – just going from the last to the first, though, the problematic section. You know, I've seen lots of bills come through this House, and you can always sort of see where someone has tried to tag on something that they needed to do, and they said, "Oh, well, where should we put this?" and they say, "Well, we have this health bill; maybe we can squeeze it in there." So you see that in the midst of something that is dealing with pharmacy and fatality inquiries and whatnot, suddenly you also have a car insurance element to this bill, right? Show me which thing is not like the others, like they used to say on *Sesame Street*. This is definitely it, this last section of this bill, which is talking about car insurance. I wonder: really, does it belong there, number one? Number two, does it undermine the other three things that are practical, reasonable things we probably could use in the bill and in our health system? You know, it almost kind of does, quite frankly, right?

Again, we've seen a long sort of history, over the last couple of years, of this government trying to make life better for car insurance companies, right? They've done a heck of a job for them. I mean, I know that my car insurance has gone up quite significantly, and I know that lots of people have been in this position where they just can't even afford it, quite frankly, anymore, where people end up with this car insurance bill that is outside of their budget. Always when you have, like, 20 per cent increases, if you don't have a pretty darn good justification to see an increase in a fundamental part of a family's household budget that exceeds the cost-of-living index, then you know that you had better have a pretty darn good explanation for that.

You know, the part that makes it even sort of worse, somehow adding insult to injury, is that, of course, people are not driving as much anymore in the last year and a half, with the pandemic, right? I mean, I had to drive here this morning because I thought it was going to rain – I usually ride my bike – but there were hardly any cars on the road at all, quite frankly. The number of kilometres that people are putting on over the last year and a half has been significantly less, so why does the car insurance get such a huge break from this UCP government, allowing them to make that correction in their insurance rates that allows them to make so much more money, like I say, squeezing lots of people's budgets, even squeezing some people out of their ability to even run a car? For so many families having a vehicle is quite essential, especially outside of densely populated urban areas.

Again, when I suddenly see a health statutes bill that has a car insurance element to it, it makes you just go: what and why and who and where? It seems to me it's part of a pattern of, as I say, making life better for car insurance companies and not Alberta families. That is moving backwards from the thing that I found to be most critical with Bill 65. You know, other elements of it, I think, serve some utility in regard to fatality inquiries, the Health Professions Act, allowing pharmacies to expand their scope of practice, providing some veterinarian supports, and so forth. It looks like the College of Pharmacy is inside with that, so, I mean, I have no reason to criticize, I suppose.

Again, when we talk about health professions legislation in general, you know, it can't go uncommented, Mr. Speaker, around just how poorly this UCP government has dealt with labour relations with our health professions around the province here over the last couple of years. I haven't seen anything like it, quite frankly, for a generation or more, where the goodwill and the tables and the places where you can talk and interface in a productive manner for our health professions have just been

totally burned up by the very adversarial and cavalier approach by this government.

We can still see the effects of it, and it's not over yet, quite frankly, because I know, just again anecdotally, doctors in my world, either in the neighbourhood or friends: if they're not thinking about moving to a different jurisdiction, there are sure lots of jurisdictions that are trying to get them to move, right? It's, like, a very competitive environment, Mr. Speaker, experienced health professionals, doctors especially, where if the larger market, that being Canada or even the United States, gets wind of a place where maybe there's unrest or instability caused by government action or what have you, they move right in and start recruiting those doctors in those jurisdictions and saying: "Hey, you know, you want to go somewhere else? We'll give you this, or we'll give you that, and we'll make life better for you, definitely."

12:20

I've seen it with one family that I know. They just got an offer to go to Hawaii, to move their practice as a heart specialist here in Edmonton. They said: "Hey, you want to come to Hawaii? We'll fly you there. We'll get you a house. We'll get you all fixed up." It's very tempting, of course, right? The only reason that those recruiters are here is because they got wind that someone has turned things upside down in the health industry in this province, and you can tempt people away when they're feeling like they're not being respected in their jobs. You know, these are the kinds of things that take a long time to build, and they're very easy to destroy, and those are reputation, Mr. Speaker, integrity, and respect.

I mean, we're still not past repair. I think that, you know, there are a lot of benefits that we do have. I know that amongst health professionals one of the things that I hear time and time again is that they like to work in a functioning, well-funded, publicly funded health care system. Why? Because you know that when you're signing up – as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs said before, you sign a Hippocratic oath or some equivalent as a nurse and so forth – you're doing it because it's a good, stable job, and it's very interesting and stimulating and so forth, but you're doing it from a position of a basic sense of care of and integrity for human beings, right?

Working in a public system where no one gets turned away based on how much money they have in their pocket, no one has their health compromised because they might live in a certain geographic area where there's less health care supply, where everyone has an opportunity to access health care that's preventative as well, not just going to the hospital when you break your leg but, you know, getting regular treatments that can prolong not just the length of your life but the quality of your life, too: all of those things are good for the population, Lord knows. We all expect and hope that they're there when we need them for ourselves and our families.

But they're good for the health care professionals, too, because then they're working in an environment where they feel and they know that maybe they're helping this one person and there's another person down the street that could use the same treatment, but they can't because they don't have enough money in their pocket, right? That's a good situation for the psychology and the mental health of your health professionals, too. All of those things work together, Mr. Speaker. Every time we build a piece of legislation, part of another brick to make it stronger, everyone is stronger for it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise on Bill 65, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. I've appreciated the debate this evening. I'm thankful to hear comments regarding this, and I also have to agree that – you know what? – it could have been worse. Based on the history and the actions that we've seen from this government, it definitely could have been worse. I think, again, I agree with the hon. members who have spoken so far this evening that there are instances within this legislation that we can agree with and that may very well have been necessary amendments to the legislation, so I can appreciate that.

I've had some opportunities to speak to Bill 65, specifically to an amendment we had previously brought forward regarding the changes that we've heard and discussed this evening when it comes to the changes to the Crown's Right of Recovery Act, specifically around the idea that the Minister of Finance now is giving himself a discretion on when to apply a fine or not apply a fine. We continue to ask for realistic or real situations where this may have been necessary, and we've heard anecdotes, unfortunately, no real stories of when this has already happened or if there are events on the horizon where this might be happening. Again, we question why, first of all, this was brought forward through Bill 65, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. I can appreciate that some of these costs go back to the Health minister and the Finance minister and it goes against potentially the ministry's finances within Health, so I understand that, but at the end of the day, you know, when we make these kinds of changes, quite substantial changes, to how things are reported and how fines are applied, I think that it's important that we're able to take that and discuss it as its own issue.

Again, we had brought forward an amendment on that, and I know that we do our best not to speak to things that have already passed or been denied before this House, but the fact is that Albertans are rightfully concerned about the track record of this government when it comes to accountability within the insurance file. The previous member spoke to it to some extent.

Of course, when this government came into power, they decided not to renew the 5 per cent cap on auto insurance fees, and what we saw from that was an escalation of the cost for Albertans when it comes to private auto insurance, and it has been an absolute disaster, Mr. Speaker. You know, this government came in on a platform that we wouldn't necessarily see, well, specific to the platform, increases to their taxes, but what we have seen are increases to many other fees and costs across the province.

Specifically, again, in this instance, we're talking about insurance, so once we saw that cap removed, many Albertans reported that their increases were upwards of 30 per cent, and at the same time, as the previous member discussed, we saw collision rates going down and payouts for collisions either stabilizing or even going down because of the fact that we aren't driving as much as Albertans, rightfully so doing our best to stay in place and stay healthy and at home through this pandemic. You may remember that, I think, at the end, Q4, of 2020 CIBC, in response to Intact Insurance's returns at that time in Q4 2020, said: could it get any better than this? That was the headline on that. We see here through the changes that are being proposed by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health that indeed it can get better for those insurance companies.

Now they don't even necessarily have to pay their fines for being late. Again I have to question: in what instances would this be used? I believe the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction said: well, maybe there'll be a flood at the office. I can appreciate that, but I hope that in most instances, hopefully all instances, these incredibly complex institutions and corporations are doing more than keeping those documents in a single place in a box in the basement, Mr.

Speaker. The fact is, again, that these are complex institutions and corporations that are in charge of protecting this information, that, rightfully so, have to on an annual basis report to pay the proper amount of taxes, and that, of course, in this instance, report to the Minister of Finance, too, so that we can understand as a government what it is going to cost our health care system and our Treasury Board. Again I question in what instances this government has seen that this might actually be reasonable or necessary.

I also question which companies are going to be allowed to not have to pay a fine anymore. When we talk about giving the minister more discretion, we've seen it over and over again that, you know, it's not applied to everyone evenly, and it's up to the Minister of Finance or whichever minister it might be affecting in that instance. That's always a worry for us, when we're talking about giving extra powers to ministers. Of course, this is – I really worry because are we talking about smaller corporations that are not going to have to apply these fines? Are we talking about the large corporations like Intact who aren't going to be applying the fine? I'm always, again, looking for consistency in legislation, and we do not see that in this instance, and that's very concerning.

Again, I would have to say that this could have been worse. I've had opportunities to speak to this already, and the majority of my concerns are specific to the changes that are being proposed around auto insurance. We see some changes that came from the recommendations from a fatality inquiry, and we've seen one of those recommendations only move forward in this legislation regarding the Mental Health Act. I think that we could have, at the end of the day, potentially done better than that. When we discussed these issues on other pieces of legislation and other bills, we said those same things. We continue to echo our concerns when those changes were originally brought before the House.

12:30

The fact is that we see instances – and I've spoken to them before – around the fact that the superintendent of auto insurance has had to put fines against insurance companies before for whether they were overcharging Albertans or whatever other reason, so we need to continue to do our best to hold these companies accountable. The work that they're doing and the insurance industry is so incredibly important to Albertans, and upholding the integrity of that is equally as important.

So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I am going to take my seat, but I believe I would like to adjourn debate at this time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I believe that is a motion.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 69 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 69, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.

This bill will make minor amendments to a number of acts which include the Income and Employment Supports Act; the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act; the Oil and Gas Conservation Act; the Companies Act; the Alberta Investment

Attraction Act; the Commercial Tenancies Protection Act; the Public Trustee Act; the Employment Standards Code; the Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020; the Public Service Employee Relations Amendment Act, 2018; the Municipal Government Act; the Special Areas Act; the Traffic Safety Act; the Societies Act; the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments are housekeeping in nature and are intended to provide clarity and consistency and I believe actually have the support of the Official Opposition, certainly, in this House. It is the traditional housekeeping bill that we would bring forward inside the Chamber.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 69?

[Motion carried; Bill 69 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, June 8.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:34 a.m. on Tuesday]

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