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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 9, 2021

Day 112

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 9, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Members' Statements

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

Pride Month

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As most of us know, June is Pride Month across the world. This month Albertans of all stripes will reflect on allyship, community, and, most importantly, love. Pride Month represents an opportunity to look back on how far we've come but also on the important work left to do in creating a society free of bigotry and welcoming to all. Pride Month is also an opportunity to celebrate the tremendous contributions of 2SLGBTQ-plus Albertans, particularly in the area of creating a more equitable society for everyone no matter who they love. It's a celebration of authenticity and the members of the 2SLGBTQ-plus community, who have paved the way for others to live their truth openly.

Canada and Alberta have much to be proud of in terms of progress on 2SLGBTQ-plus issues. Edmonton's first pride festival was held in 1980. Sexual orientation and gender identity were read into the Canadian Charter of Rights in 1995, and the provision for same-sex marriage was implemented through the Civil Marriage Act in 2005. But regressive policies persist such as the ban on blood donations on the part of gay men in Canada. Screening practices render the blood ban completely unnecessary, and we all need to come together to advocate against these prejudicial practices.

Although large events are still on hold, there are many ways for Albertans to show their support. Tomorrow the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women will host a virtual flag raising with members of the community and other government MLAs. Flags will be raised at government centres in Edmonton and Calgary. If you're unable to join us virtually, I hope you'll participate in events, virtual or otherwise, in your own communities. As we move towards being better able to gather in groups again, I hope that Albertans will keep the spirit of pride alive over the coming year.

Corporate Taxation and Job Creation

Ms Ganley: Trickle-down economics doesn't work. This is the fundamental problem with the UCP's so-called jobs plan. It doesn't work, it hasn't worked – 50,000 jobs lost before the pandemic – and it won't work. Tax cuts for extremely profitable corporations do not generally result in higher employment or higher incomes for working people. We've known this for a while.

What does the UCP plan do? It makes the rich richer. It means those born with lots of money to invest get more. It doesn't create jobs, and it won't help working people. It will also increase executive bonuses. I am sure hard-working Albertans will be glad to know that the UCP plan will make sure that there are a few more millions in those pockets. The UCP plan won't create jobs, but it will hurt working people. Evidence and history tell us what the UCP's job plan really does. It creates more wealth for those born wealthy, and it shifts the burden of taxes to Alberta families, families who are already struggling with inflation and struggling to

pay for child care. I have no doubt that this project will have beneficial effects for UCP-aligned corporate PACs, PACs that will spend millions trying to convince Albertans that corporate tax handouts will one day trickle down to the rest of us.

The thing is that I don't think Albertans are buying it anymore. I think they see through the UCP's trickle-down rhetoric. I think Alberta is ready for a new plan, a plan that will build an economy for all, a plan where hard work is worth more and being rich is worth less, a plan with working people at the centre and a stop to the race to the bottom.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has a statement to make.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout for Youth

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year and a half students have had to struggle with several shifts from in-class learning to online and back again. It's been difficult, and we want to make sure that students don't face this same struggle going forward. Vaccines are a tool that will help keep our classrooms safe for in-class learning and prevent further disruptions to everyone's education. There are some who've had some concerns about youth vaccinations, but I want to affirm that vaccines are safe for our younger population and will only further help us to reach our goal to end this pandemic and return to some semblance of normalcy.

I'm thrilled to hear that as of last Thursday 75,000 youth aged 12 to 14 received their first dose, representing 45 per cent of that age group, while youth aged 15 to 19 received 133,000 first doses, representing 51 per cent of that age group. The recent uptake in first doses is encouraging. But we have the supply, and we can do much more to ensure that we protect our communities. Any child that was born between 2004 and 2009 is eligible to receive their first dose.

I've heard from parents in my constituency that they are afraid of in-school transmission, but our best line of defence for everyone eligible is to receive their vaccine, including teenagers. They're part of the community, and we should not assume that there is immunity based on age. Though they are at lower risk to catch the virus, vaccines are our best way to ensure that everyone is safe and that education staff, students, and families are protected.

To everyone listening: please go get your vaccination. The sooner we all get vaccinated, the sooner we can enjoy a great Albertan summer and ensure a safe return to the classroom in the fall for our youth.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Bilous: Alberta's tech ecosystem has been growing for years. The success we're seeing today is due to the hard work of the entrepreneurs in the tech community. It's unfortunate that after being elected, the UCP turned their backs on diversification and declared it a luxury. One of the first things they did was to hand over \$4.7 billion to already-profitable corporations. To pay for this corporate giveaway, the UCP cancelled several tax credits that were working to attract investment, diversify our economy, and create jobs in the tech sector. And while they introduced the innovation employment grant, it has not provided a single penny to date, and funding doesn't begin until next year. That means that tech start-ups will go three years without any support from this government, and it means that any growth in the tech sector in the last couple of years is in spite of the UCP government, not because of them.

According to a recent report there's now a gap in early-stage funding in Calgary. The report's author attributed this gap to the UCP's cancellation of the Alberta investor tax credit. He had heard

of investors that stopped investing altogether in Alberta companies when the UCP cancelled the tax credit. He also issued a warning that, quote, a stoppage at the early stage can lead to the collapse of an entire industry. End quote.

This government's decision to remove the investor tax credit risks killing the momentum that has been built up over a number of years and even presents a risk to the entire industry. Instead of a government that sees diversification as a luxury, we need one that makes it a priority. We need to restore the investor tax credit but also look at new and innovative ways to attract investment for start-ups, like an Alberta venture fund that will allow Albertans to invest directly in tech companies. By doing so, we can grow our tech sector, diversify our economy, create jobs, and become a leader in the tech sector. I encourage the government to visit albertasfuture.ca for details.

Men's Mental Health

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on a subject that I know is difficult but I feel we need to talk about. June is Canadian Men's Mental Health Month, which seeks to raise awareness around something that feels taboo even in today's society. The PubMed Central journal stated in 2019 that men are more hesitant to reach out when it comes to their mental health challenges. The Centre for Suicide Prevention states that "men die by suicide in numbers almost four times [greater than] women."

Mr. Speaker, 2020 saw a total of 468 suicides in Alberta; 78 per cent of the suicides were men. The sad reality is that many men feel like they need to be strong, to tough it out, and to bottle it up inside. Even with today's social media, when it has never been more socially acceptable to tell your peers how you feel, men still struggle. It breaks my heart to hear that. I can only imagine how the pandemic has made life more difficult for everyone but especially the men in our lives, that feel a need to bottle up their emotions.

It is also no secret that poor mental health can result in bad habits and lead to serious physical health challenges. However, Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled that we have a ministry devoted to mental health and addictions. Our government has invested over \$140 million in mental health supports plus an additional \$53 million invested in the COVID-19 community grant.

My message this Men's Mental Health Month is simple: we need to talk openly about mental health. To suffer in silence is unhealthy and unsafe for all the men in our lives. Recognizing men's mental health is not just a man's issue; it's a family issue. Check in with the men in your life. Ask them how they're feeling. One simple question can change a life. If you're experiencing mental health challenges, seek help. The AHS mental health line is open 24/7 and can be reached at 1.877.303.2642. Remember: it's okay to not be okay. You are not alone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40 Racism and Hate Crime Prevention

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, you know what Muslims and racialized Albertans want? They want to know that in the face of anti-Muslim terrorism their government is taking substantive action to protect them. Unfortunately, under the UCP they are not going to get that. The UCP refuse to create a provincial hate crime unit because that might reveal its record of enforcement. The police tried to convince one victim of anti-Muslim hate not to report the incident as a hate crime. How on earth will we protect Muslims if the police refuse to prosecute those crimes?

Since 1988 the Alberta Human Rights Commission has been giving out a grant to fund antiracism initiatives. The UCP axed the

fund. Now as anti-Muslim hate rises in the province, the UCP not only failed to restore the fund but refuses to increase the Alberta Human Rights Commission's ability to prevent hate crimes. The UCP refuse to commit to working with BIPOC communities to create a plan to prevent hate crimes and support the victims of hate crimes. They refuse to table the report and recommendations of the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council and to release a concrete antiracism action plan. They refuse to create a bipartisan committee that will create, implement, and report on that plan. They put out a draft curriculum that contains degrading discussion of slavery, contains racist words, and doesn't teach kids about the contributions of people of colour to the province.

The minister of multiculturalism and the Justice minister both can accuse me of playing politics, but, Mr. Speaker, if the UCP simply did what any good government does, which is protect all of its citizens, we wouldn't need to get up and call them out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seniors

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. June 7 was the beginning of Alberta Seniors' Week. This week in Alberta we celebrate and recognize our amazing seniors for the contributions they have made to make our communities better. Alberta is home to more than 670,000 individuals over the age of 65, and in my own riding of Calgary-North there are more than 3,000 seniors.

The Minister of Seniors and Housing has launched a call for nominations for the 2021 minister's seniors awards. Albertans can nominate individuals, businesses, and nonprofit organizations who have supported their seniors through volunteerism, innovation, and outstanding service. If you have someone or an organization in mind, I encourage you to put their name forward as the deadline of June 30, 2021, is fast approaching.

Today I would like to encourage all of you to take time to connect with a senior while, of course, adhering to the public health guidelines. Last week I delivered over 500 token bags to the following facilities for seniors in my riding: Covenant Care Holy Cross Manor, Covenant Care St. Marguerite Manor, Covenant Living Evanston Summit, and Evanston Grand Village. This was to show my appreciation for their efforts to make our communities better and stronger. Seniors play an integral role in our society, and our government is committed to ensuring seniors are protected and cared for. That's why we provided \$750,000 over two years to the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council, created new rent support, and got seniors vaccinated first.

Before closing, I would like to extend my sincerest condolences and sympathies to the families who have lost a loved one during this past pandemic. May I ask all of the members of the House to join me in celebrating the strength and generosity of our seniors and wishing them a very happy Seniors' Week.

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

Member's Mother

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to let the House know that within the next couple of weeks my wife and I are expecting to welcome our first child into our family. This is a great privilege, and I couldn't think of a better partner to have on our journey.

Through this process I've also had the opportunity to reflect on my own mother's story. Kimberly Carson was just 14 when I was

born. She raised me as a single mother, and I can't even begin to imagine the sacrifices she made to take care of me while trying to finish school. Through her experience she's instilled in me the values that are the basis for why I ran and why I chose to run for the NDP. She taught me that if ever your voice may effect change, you should use that not to focus on the most well off but use that voice to tell the stories of those who are being left behind.

In her journey \$25-a-day affordable child care would have made a real difference. It would have meant she could spend more time focused on the important work of finishing school without worrying about how she was going to put food on our table. Child care should not be something that we are willing to compromise on. This is why I'm so proud that NDP members voted to support such a program at our convention last weekend, and why I'm so devastated that this government has sat on its hands instead of expanding the program that was in place.

Mr. Speaker, my mother would have also benefited from a higher minimum wage, yet we see this UCP government ignoring the real stories of young families and instead legislating a lower minimum wage for those under 18.

When it comes to ensuring we support the next generation of families better than we supported the last, I will never stop fighting for fairer minimum wages and universal affordable child care. Indeed, it is the best way I can think of to repay my mom and all of the other families who have struggled for far too long. And when it comes to welcoming my first child into the world, I know that if I can be half the parent my own mother was to me, everything will be okay.

Thank you.

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

Farmer's Day

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Friday, June 11, is Farmer's Day in Alberta. Even though there won't be large events, we can still celebrate all that Alberta farmers do for this province. Farmer's Day was established in 1951 by Premier Ernest Manning. The Alberta government of that time declared every second Friday in June to be a farmer's holiday even though anyone that has ever worked on a farm knows that holidays are few and far between. Farmer's Day in 1951 meant that schools closed for the day and festivities were held by the local community. Farmer's Day offered a rest in between busy farming seasons. As time has passed, the significance of this day is no longer just a holiday or a rest. It's about honouring agriculture in our province. I am proud to be a farmer and to represent the interests of farmers from all over the province.

Agriculture is Alberta's second-largest industry, but it is, by far, the largest renewable industry we have and the backbone of our economy. We understand that 20, 50, 100 years from now the world will still need Alberta's farmers to feed them, likely more so than ever before. The agricultural industry is an industry that has been built by farmers' hard work, dedication, and their love of the land. Agricultural success in this province is a story of how a group of immigrants overcame a harsh climate, a lack of infrastructure, and numerous other obstacles to become the breadbasket of Canada. Alberta is now one of the world's most productive agricultural economies and is Canada's second-largest agricultural producer. Thanks in part to a thriving agriculture industry, Alberta is well positioned to be a major contributor to post COVID-19 economic recovery and growth.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a proud history of resilient, innovative farmers and ranchers. Let's honour them this Friday, on Farmer's

Day, and may God bless them throughout this growing season. And remember: if you ate today, thank a farmer.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a tabling.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have with me several report cards that were given to me by Mary Oxendale Spensley, who is a Raging Granny in Calgary. She has given report cards to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health, and many others, and she's asked me to make sure that they're known publicly. I think that her letter grade speaks for itself.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has a tabling.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. I have two tablings, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. The first is a Calgary tech report done by Hockeystick, that was done in Q4 of 2020, looking at the Calgary tech ecosystem.

My second tabling is a report by betakit, that took Hockeystick's Calgary tech report, identifying an early-stage funding gap in Alberta caused by the cancellation of the Alberta investor tax credit.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time is 1:50. Should there be a requirement after Oral Question Period, we will return to the remainder of tablings.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Federal Equalization Program

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in the middle of his apology tour the Premier announced plans this week for a referendum vote on his Harper-era equalization policy. Despite the Premier's tough talk, his own staff acknowledge that it won't accomplish anything more than anger and division. If Canada is going to open the Constitution, it will need the support of Parliament and at least one candidate for Prime Minister, so I sent a letter to Erin O'Toole today. But can the Premier tell me this instead: will the leader of the federal Conservatives be seeking to remove the principle of equalization from our Constitution?

The Speaker: I'm not sure what the role of the Alberta government is in Erin O'Toole's position on the role of equalization, but if the Premier would like to respond, he's welcome to do so.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's failed record on equalization is clear. In response to Quebec constantly getting higher payments while Alberta was in a deep recession, the NDP said that they were agnostic about federal transfers and equalization. They asked for no changes. They surrendered. This government was elected on a platform to give Albertans a direct voice on equalization, and we are keeping that promise with a referendum this October.

Ms Notley: Well, somehow it's my fault because I couldn't clean up his mess. Don't worry, Mr. Speaker; I'll be on it in 2023.

The Premier wants to convince Albertans that he has a Trojan Horse when it's actually a My Little Pony, a plastic hobby horse, deployed solely to prop up Canada's least popular Premier, him. Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the Premier helped to write the flawed

equalization formula. I'll ask the same question that the no-jobs minister asked him during their leadership debate: why did the Premier vote in favour of the formula federally, and why didn't he do anything to fix it when he had the chance?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may shock the member to know that the minister of immigration in Ottawa does not write the equalization formula. Equalization has existed for six decades. Previous Alberta governments did not seek reforms to equalization; this provincial government is. We're going to give Albertans a direct say on that. I was proud to belong to a federal government that gave Alberta full per capita funding for postsecondary education, for social transfers, for health transfers, which was a multibillion-dollar benefit to the province of Alberta, something the NDP never did a thing about.

Ms Notley: I wasn't in the federal government, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government he was part of also had the ability to change equalization at their discretion any time. If the Member of Parliament for Calgary Midnapore had bothered to pop by his office in Calgary in the fall of 2014, he would have known that the situation in Alberta required a rewrite of the formula then. Instead, he and his boss sat on their hands and wasted a majority federal government. Why doesn't the Premier apologize to Albertans for doing nothing to help them when he had the power to do it? Where's that apology?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has a very short memory. She may, if she searches her memory, recall the Premier of Newfoundland taking the Canadian flags down from the Legislature because of equalization reform, which also affected Quebec. That same government, led by Mr. Harper, gave Alberta full per capita funding under the health and social transfers, which was worth billions of dollars, unlike the members opposite. Their Finance minister said, quote, I'm kind of agnostic in terms of the transfer payments that are currently in place, and it's not something, as the Finance minister, that I'm focused on at this point in time. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Oil prices started dropping, and that federal minister was agnostic about the future of Alberta.

UCP Members' Edmonton Federal Building Gathering

Ms Notley: Now, yesterday the Premier was unwilling to answer questions, so let's try again. I'll start by reviewing the facts. Fact 1: his liquor cabinet includes the very ministers making rules around public health. Fact 2: his liquor cabinet has marathon meetings where they drink forties of whisky while making decisions. Fact 3: fact 2 means that he and his liquor cabinet really can't remember the rules they made in fact 1. The Premier's apology was five days late. It was self-serving. What consequences will the Premier and his inner circle of ministers face for this behaviour?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the NDP leader doesn't want to focus on the great economic news that's happening in this province. Just last week Mphasis, a global high-tech company, announced a thousand new jobs in the high-tech sector in Calgary. That's about a thousand more than were created in that industry under the four years of the NDP. And today the world's largest hydrogen producer, Air Products, announced a \$1.3 billion investment, creating 2,600 jobs in Alberta, and said: this is because

of the aggressiveness of the Premier and his staff to get us here to make the first investment, so we give them full credit.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, taking full responsibility requires actually being sorry. Moreover, it requires accepting the consequences of your decisions. The Premier spent days mocking Albertans who are rightfully outraged by his behaviour and only apologized when he realized he was going up against the hall monitors, as his own staff called them, in his own caucus. That's not sincerity. That's self-preservation. This liquor cabinet deserves real consequences. Albertans are watching. This House is watching. Where are the consequences?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I invite any New Democrat MLA who has not been within two metres of another Albertan outside of their household over the past 16 months to please rise now. The reality is that Albertans made a good-faith effort to comply with rules, but I think that probably 4.5 million Albertans have found themselves within two metres of someone else.

The NDP doesn't want to talk about the dynamic growth in Alberta's economy, the Conference Board this week confirming that we are leading Canada in economic growth with 7 and a half per cent of our economy this year.

Ms Notley: Well, according to that answer it seems like the Premier and his liquor cabinet are going to get off Scotch free. His own caucus, though, doesn't think that's fair, especially since he has threatened them with expulsion if they broke the rules not even six months ago. The MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul said he expects to see consequences, and the member for Airdrie agreed that there needs to be accountability. Does the Premier agree with his caucus that there needs to be accountability? I wonder: where is the culture of humility that he promised? "Other people do it. Why can't I?" That's not humility, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we've addressed that matter.

What Albertans want is a government focused on jobs and growth, and that is what is happening in this province today. Leading Canada in economic growth. Leading Canada in job growth. This \$1.3 billion announcement today is a game changer. It puts Alberta ahead in the global race for the new multitrillion-dollar hydrogen industry, that will not only create jobs but at the same time reduce emissions.

And – she won't like this, Mr. Speaker, but I'll give her a bit of a heads-up – there are many more investments like this to be announced in the days to come.

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

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday Edmonton public school board trustee Michael Janz proposed that Edmonton voters should have a referendum on curriculum this fall. Previously the Premier told this House that referendums are, quote, to take power of the government to make decisions and entrust it to every adult Albertan. End quote. He said that his government was for democracy. If the Premier trusts Albertans as much as he claims, will he let the people of Alberta vote on his draft curriculum by having a referendum on it during the election this fall? Yes or no, Premier?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP will have a chance later today to vote on the citizens' initiative referendum law that will empower Mr. Janz or the Member for Edmonton-Glenora or anyone else that will sign a petition to advance an initiative referendum on

matters of public concern. If 10 per cent of Alberta voters sign that petition, it goes on the ballot. I know the NDP doesn't like it because they're no longer really the New Democratic Party. They're opposed to every major democratic reform.

Ms Hoffman: If the Premier truly believes he has a mandate to ram through his terrible curriculum and that Albertans support him with it, he shouldn't be afraid to put the question on the ballot. The formally United Conservative Party government talks a big game about democratic principles but almost never backs them. They claim to support recall but wrote a bill that makes recall impossible. The Premier waxes poetic about parliamentary democracy but shuts down the House when he's facing a caucus revolt. Now, why won't the Premier stand in this place today and say that he will put a referendum forward on the curriculum if he's so proud of it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we all know that if the NDP had their way, this House would have been shut down for most of the past year, just like our schools and just like most Alberta businesses.

With respect to direct democracy, we are implementing our specific campaign commitments to Albertans. We said that we would emulate the thresholds in recall and initiative that are found in the British Columbia legislation. That was introduced by a New Democrat government. The only difference between the B.C. New Democrats and the Alberta New Democrats is that in British Columbia they actually support direct democracy.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: The Minister of Justice told this House just on Monday that he was looking forward to Albertans being able to speak on issues through a referendum. Why isn't the Premier standing beside that minister? Is it because he's not part of the liquor cabinet? Premier, step up. Come to this place with questions that matter to ordinary Albertans. If you really believe your Education minister has the back of Albertans, let Albertans have a vote. Bring forward a referendum this fall all across Alberta about curriculum along with your equalization if you so choose. Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government was elected on a commitment to hold a referendum this October on the principle of equalization. Promise made, promise kept. This government was elected on a commitment to introduce recall legislation. Promise made, promise kept. The NDP actually stood up and said that our referendum act was, quote, undemocratic, and now they're opposed to both initiative and recall laws. It's no longer the New Democratic Party; they're now the Old Autocratic Party.

Preserving Canada's Economic Prosperity Act

Ms Ganley: The cracks in the UCP caucus continue to grow larger. After the government removed refined fuels from the turn-off-the-taps bill, the opposition stepped up to put the teeth back in the bill. We even got support of two independent members and even two members of the government caucus, the Member for Red Deer-South and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Sadly, other government members voted the amendment down. Why is this Premier only interested in a watered-down version of the legislation? Some of his caucus seems to know better.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Obviously, the NDP would rather see an unconstitutional piece of legislation. Having refined fuels in Bill 72 would make it

unconstitutional. No doubt the NDP doesn't realize that because they never, ever, ever had any intention of using it. They never had any intention of standing up for the energy sector. It's just evident that they don't support the energy sector.

Ms Ganley: It's amazing to see what happens to MLAs when they get out from underneath the leadership of the Premier, as the newly independents did. It was pretty surprising to me that the MLAs for Red Deer-South and Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo voted in favour of the amendment, breaking party lines. Clearly, some members of the government won't toe the liquor cabinet line. It turns out that turn-off-the-taps legislation might actually be a deeply held value for some of his caucus. How many more does the Premier think will jump off this sinking ship?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP obviously do not know what the Constitution says. [interjections] They do not know what section 92A says, that gives the rights to exclusive jurisdiction for primary production. The NDP probably . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. It's becoming more and more difficult to hear the answer to the question. The Speaker has the right to do so.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP probably don't even know what a refined fuel is. They don't understand the Constitution, they don't understand the energy sector, and they don't understand that having refined fuel in Bill 72 would make it unconstitutional. It's just evident that they do not support the energy sector.

Ms Ganley: The Premier is talking and drinking with his liquor cabinet, but clearly he forgot to tell the members for Red Deer-South and Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo why he wanted to pass much weaker turn-off-the-taps legislation. I suspect that the members are sick of watching this Premier's failed economic plan: 50,000 jobs lost prepandemic, 200,000 Albertans currently looking for work in an empty downtown core. Premier, explain to these members why they should continue to stand behind your disastrous economic plan and your broken election promises.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, you know, it is sad that when we see Alberta enjoying the best economic growth in Canada, while we recovered all of the jobs lost through the pandemic, when week after week we are getting massive multibillion-dollar job creating investments, all the NDP wants to do is to talk down Alberta. Today Seifi Ghasemi, CEO of Air Products, one of the largest companies in the world, announced a \$1.3 billion initial investment, which he said that he may quadruple. He said that it's because, quote, of the aggressiveness of the Premier and his staff to get us there to make the first investment, so I give them full credit. Unquote.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Polytechnic Postsecondary Institutions

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans think of postsecondary education, they typically think about receiving a bachelor's degree at a university or college. Quite often polytechnic postsecondary institutions are overlooked and not always considered. The reality is that pursuing an education at a polytechnic institution can create valuable, lifelong careers through high-quality degrees, hands-on apprenticeship, and diploma

programs. To the minister: how has the transition of Grande Prairie Regional College and Red Deer College into polytechnic status been received within the province?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the very important question. I have to say that, broadly, the announcements with respect to Red Deer College and Grande Prairie College are being met with warm enthusiasm. Dr. Peter Nunoda, president of Red Deer College, said: this is the ideal future for our institution. Savannah Snow, the Red Deer College Students' Association president, said that this is a fantastic next step. In fact, you know, when I reflect on it, the only ones who I think are speaking negatively are the NDP, but of course they're always angry. We always just continue to hear negative things from the NDP. We've seen very similar positive comments from Grande Prairie as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that the polytechnic designations of both Red Deer and Grande Prairie will provide Albertans with more opportunities and given that these two polytechnic designations will have its institutions align its programs with its local students, businesses, and the industry needs, to the Minister of Advanced Education: how will Alberta's expansion to polytechnic education help students prepare for jobs within their local economies throughout Alberta and on the global stage?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, this was one of the very important elements that we examined when making these very crucial decisions. We have to ensure that we make decisions that affect our postsecondary institutions that will strengthen regional economies. I had serious concerns with some of the direction of the NDP in terms of a university transition for some of these institutions as it could put important programming such as trades and other applied programs at risk that are necessary for strengthening the regional economy and for ensuring that students in the region receive access to the programming that is needed. I'm confident that these programs will help.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again thank you to the minister. Given that the addition of polytechnic institutions within Alberta will further the academic development and education of students and given that the expansion of both Red Deer and Grande Prairie will prepare students to fit the needs of the local economies and further given that our government brought forward the Alberta 2030 vision, which prioritizes the development of postsecondary education, to the minister: how does the addition of these two polytechnic schools fit into Alberta's 2030 vision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the critical and essential pillars of Alberta 2030 – which, just to remind the House, this is the first time in over 15 years that Alberta has a comprehensive, strategic plan for our postsecondary system. But one of those elements is focused on building skills for jobs; that is to say to ensure that our students have the skills, knowledge, and competencies that they need to succeed in their careers when they graduate. Establishing Red Deer and Grande Prairie as polytechnic institutions will allow them to focus on precisely this effort and will

allow them to focus on giving their students the skills they need to succeed.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

Mr. Feehan: Today the five largest oil sands producers announced that they were co-operating with each other in all levels of government, including the provincial government, to reach their net zero goals. These ambitious goals will help set our producers up to be competitive in the global markets of the decades to come. Over the weekend we announced that we would hope to move toward a net zero electricity grid, but unfortunately the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity dismissed this as pure fantasy. Why does the minister dismiss these ambitious goals when major companies are setting bold targets with the full intention of meeting them?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, news flash: in the throne speech last year the government said that it will work with Alberta energy producers to help them achieve their net zero goals. We've been working with the five major producers who made that statement today for several months. A key plank of that is our successful campaign to get a federal commitment for a carbon capture, utilization, and storage tax incentive. With respect to renewable energy since the NDP got kicked out of office and we repealed their carbon tax and we went to an energy-only market, we have seen the greatest ever investments in renewable energy and the biggest renewable build in the country happening here in Alberta.

2:10

Mr. Feehan: Well, you better tell your gas minister about your own bill.

Given that the Premier today joined an announcement of a project that could help us get to a net zero grid and given that more and more technologies are ready that can help us get to a net zero electricity grid by 2035 and given that the U.S. is committed to a similar goal by 2035 and given that the forecast for the share of renewables and electricity generation under this government has only gone one direction, which is down, why is the minister failing so badly, leaving billions in renewable investment on the table, and operating in direct contravention of provincial renewable electricity law?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, what a remarkable question on a day when Alberta has been identified by the largest hydrogen producer in the world as a key target for massive hydrogen investments, one of the most important technologies. By the way, the NDP strategy on climate policy punished people for living normal lives. The Conservative strategy on climate invests in technology to reduce emissions. A \$1.3 billion hydrogen plant being announced for Edmonton today, and the CEO said that that may be quadrupled: that's a real difference.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, with no preamble.

Mr. Feehan: Given that international investors are looking to jurisdictions that act on ambitious climate goals and given that we have seen that our producers are willing to move forward on that and given that the government's strategy so far of embarrassing war rooms and bogus inquiries has done nothing but harm to our reputation and given that 50,000 jobs were lost by this government before the pandemic began and currently 200,000 Albertans are looking for work, does the minister really think that she is going to

get a seat at the liquor cabinet when she is failing so badly to build Alberta's economic future?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's strategy on these issues was a stealth tax that made everything more expensive to punish people for shopping for their groceries, filling up their gas tanks, and heating their homes. Our strategy is – I'll tell you something. The NDP opposed the wise decision 15 years ago for a former Alberta Conservative government to invest in carbon capture, utilization, and storage technology and infrastructure. This announcement today and many other multibillion-dollar projects that we are landing are because of that foresight, a decision the NDP always opposed.

Coal Development Policies

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, people in southern Alberta don't like the plan of the formerly United Conservative Party to strip-mine our previously protected mountains. People do not want our water taken away. People, in particular the city of Lethbridge, have been very clear, but the minister of environment has not been very clear. So the city of Lethbridge and at least seven other cities, towns, and counties have signed on to a coal restriction policy. Let's get to first things first. Albertans have yet to hear the environment minister apologize for being more focused on the rocks in his whisky glass than protecting the Rocky Mountains. Will the environment minister apologize?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're proud of the hard work that this government is doing on the environment, some of the most significant investments on site conservation all across this province that the province of Alberta has seen in a decade, a sharp contrast to that official member when she was an environment minister just a few short years ago, who spent most of her time in that office focused on trying to shut Albertans out of the landscapes that they enjoy on the weekends. It's unfortunate that the NDP continue to play politics; we're excited about the work that we're doing on the environment. We're going to continue to make sure that we protect the environment so that we can use it now as well as make sure it's there for future generations and still be able to create jobs inside our province.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that I did not hear an apology to the people of Alberta, the people of southern Alberta for this environment minister's role in that little liquor cabinet party that he had last week, given that Albertans do not feel heard by this minister of environment, the rest of the liquor cabinet, or anyone else who might get a little bit of time with the Premier and given that the government should spend more time listening to southern Albertans on this issue of coal and less time raising a glass with Australian billionaires or anyone else, will the Premier or this environment minister – first of all, he needs to apologize, but second of all, will he commit to a referendum on restoring Lougheed's coal policy?

Mrs. Savage: It's very interesting that the Member for Lethbridge-West continues to ask questions on coal because in this very Chamber – this very Chamber – on March 13, 2018, when she was asked a question about coal and she was the environment minister, she said: "Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Alberta does have a number of metallurgical coal interests and will continue to develop those." They were looking at developing coal. That was on the heels of the NDP Energy minister opening the doors to category 2 strip mining.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that our government did buy out metallurgical coal mining interests in the Castle in order to protect

it, given that this minister just carried water for the liquor cabinet, papered over the fact that this minister of environment won't take responsibility for his role in the patio palace, and given that southern Albertans have had quite enough of this government not listening to their concerns, will this Premier commit to a meeting with the city of Lethbridge and any other municipality that signed on to the coal restriction policy, or is he too busy getting hammered at the sky palace?

Mrs. Savage: I can hardly hear the question with all the hysteria and hysterical ranting and raging, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if on the day when she was promoting coal in this Chamber . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mrs. Savage: . . . on March 13, 2018, there was that much ranting. Well, no, Mr. Speaker, because they were trying to develop coal. They were trying to encourage metallurgical coal development not only in southern Alberta but on category 2 lands in northern Alberta. For shame that they're talking about coal. They were trying to develop it, and they won't take responsibility for their actions. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

COVID-19 Related Restrictions Premier's Remarks on Alberta Separatism

Mr. Barnes: This morning a poll was released showing that this Premier remains the least popular Premier in Canada for the second month. Another poll shows that he has divided the Conservative movement and led his party to a historic collapse in support. As illustrated by the sky palace Patiogate, Alberta's Premier apparently doesn't know his own government's health restrictions, but that didn't stop them from prosecuting other Albertans. My question to the least popular Premier in Canada: when will he do the right thing for the province and step down so that we can get back to focusing on government and Albertans' business?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer about the open for summer plan, our staged planned reopening. I'm not surprised that the member wasn't paying attention to the recent announcements as he's paid very little attention to any previous announcements regarding restrictions and the reopening plans. Look, we are proceeding with stage 2 tomorrow. That's going to be easing many restrictions on our businesses throughout the province; good news for all throughout the province. Then once we get to two weeks after 70 per cent of eligible Albertans get a second dose, we'll be proceeding with stage 3.

Mr. Barnes: The stated purpose of the COVID-19 lockdowns was to protect Alberta hospitals. Given that according to the chief medical officer of health there are now currently well under 100 Albertans in ICU, yet for some reason the Premier's lockdown remains in place, including a ban on private indoor gatherings, and given that the Premier finally admitted this week that he violated his own health restrictions, my question again to the least popular Premier in Canada: how many times has he violated his own government's COVID policies, including the ban on inviting people to private homes, with his rules for thee but not for me approach?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I have said previously, we're going to be proceeding with stage 2 tomorrow. It's going to be easing many of the restrictions on our businesses throughout the

province, and then once we get to two weeks after 70 per cent of eligible Albertans being able to receive their first dose, we will then, two weeks after that, be proceeding with stage 3, which will remove all the restrictions except for perhaps some safety protocols that we needed still for our hospitals and long-term care facilities, which is fantastic news for all. Unlike other provinces throughout the pandemic that have had to have sheltering in place lockdowns, we in Alberta have avoided that because of the added capacity that AHS has added throughout the province.

Mr. Barnes: The Premier and his liquor cabinet's hypocrisy calls the government's announcement on equalization to fall completely flat. Given that the fair deal report did not go far enough, given that I proposed the creation of a provincial constitution and given that the Premier has come around, telling Braid, "We are plotting out a longer term strategy, to build a . . . more autonomous Alberta . . . one idea could be . . . the codification of an Alberta provincial constitution," again to the least popular Premier in Canada. Last week you were calling me a separatist; now you're stealing my ideas. Is it current government policy to call independent members of this Legislature a separatist?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't have enough time in that previous 35 seconds to answer all of the questions and all of the misinformation the member was saying previously. As we have announced, the open for summer plan is based on the metric of vaccination. Incredibly important for us to be able to focus on the safety and focus on the lives of Albertans while we continue to, in a smart and responsible but also an accelerated way, be able to proceed with an opening plan so that we can have restrictions on our businesses ease more quickly than perhaps other provinces are also being able to do throughout the country. Good for everybody in the province that we're going to be able to proceed tomorrow with stage 2.

The Speaker: Hon. members, apologies. At 2:16, in the previous set of questions, the hon. Official Opposition House Leader did raise a point of order, that I failed to note.

Job Creation

Mr. Bilous: Last week Stats Canada released the job numbers for May. The UCP took a victory lap on these numbers and raised the mission accomplished banner on social media, but last month we lost a thousand jobs, totalling 14,000 jobs lost over the last two months. While the reports showed that Alberta's unemployment rate had dropped to 8.7 per cent, that's only because 25,000 Albertans gave up looking for a job and left the workforce altogether. That's 25,000 Albertans who gave up hope under this government. Why is this government celebrating the loss of 14,000 jobs and 25,000 people leaving the workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The May jobs report actually was good news for Alberta overall. While every province had seen declines in employment, Alberta stayed flat and, in fact, added about 7,700 jobs in the resource sector and forestry sector. We've added over 14,000 jobs in the resource sector above our pre-COVID levels. Our economic recovery plan is working.

Mr. Bilous: Staying flat is not something to celebrate.

Given that while the UCP likes to point to theoretical projections about jobs and forecasts, the current reality paints a much different picture – according to economists, Alberta is actually lagging the rest of the country in economic growth this year – and given that Alberta had the worst performing economy in the country last year with over 200,000 Albertans currently unemployed, given that this government keeps promising jobs now, where are the actual jobs for Albertans right here and now? No more empty . . .

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have already recovered almost 90 per cent of the jobs that were lost due to the pandemic and the greatest energy price collapse in modern history. Moreover, we've added 14,000 jobs in the resource sector, again, over and above our pre-COVID numbers. Our economic recovery plan is working, contrary to the member opposite's assertion.

Mr. Bilous: Not working well enough.

Given that the UCP continues to talk about promises of jobs years in the future while Albertans today continue to give up hope and leave the workforce, given that this government has had two years and done nothing – promises don't put food on the table, and they don't pay the mortgage – given that this government promised 55,000 jobs with their failed corporate handout but lost 50,000 jobs before the pandemic ever hit our province, how can Albertans trust this government to create jobs when they've already failed them so many times? Perhaps this is why the Premier is the least trusted in all of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite are simply out of touch with the momentum that's building currently in the Alberta economy. Just recently Mphasis announced that it's bringing a thousand jobs over the next two years to Calgary. The Alberta tech sector reported a venture capital investment of \$500 million in 2020. That was double the previous year at a time when all provinces went down in 2020, and 2021 is starting out even better. The Conference Board of Canada predicts Alberta to lead in real GDP growth in '21 and '22.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has the call.

Forestry Content in Educational Curriculum

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Albertans have a problem with this government's draft curriculum; 95 per cent of schools, in fact, aren't going to pilot it and have cited a slew of problems with its content. This government has also taken out the mention of forestry. In a province known for our beautiful landscapes, mountains, trees, this minister seems to believe that a huge part of our backyard is not worth learning about. Why does the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry believe that Alberta students don't need to learn about our trees and our forestry? Aren't these things important to him? Has he even looked at the draft curriculum?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I want to just take us back about two years ago. Aside from jobs, the economy, and support for our energy industry, what I heard knocking on doors was how badly we needed a change in direction

on the curriculum. That is why the Minister of Education has worked so hard to present Albertans with a draft curriculum. Why? Because we want their feedback. We want to be transparent. We are listening to their concerns. That includes parents, that includes teachers, and that includes our school board partners and even members opposite who want to provide constructive feedback for the curriculum. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that lumber has seen a huge boom during the pandemic and forestry is a massive economic driver and is important to the culture of rural Albertans and given that completely removing any mention of this pivotal industry further alienates rural Albertans in this province's economic recovery and given that forestry is Alberta's third-largest resource industry, producing some of the world's best forest products because of our cold climate and slow growth, to the minister: why does this curriculum ignore major parts of our economy and industry? What is the minister going to do to fix this today?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a little interesting. The NDP obviously are hot off the heels of their convention last weekend, where their leader got North Korea-type leadership support numbers. Also, when it comes to curriculum, what they want to have with schools was actually a motion to eliminate all independent schools in Alberta. When it comes to listening to Albertans, when it comes to curriculum and to schools in this province, it's something that we do on this side of the House.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was talking about our forestry industry, rural Alberta economy, and our curriculum.

Given that Alberta forestry producers are committed to protecting forest health and high water and air quality standards to promote responsible environmental operations and given that the future of Alberta's economy hinges on our ability to operate in a way that is sustainable and limits emissions on carbon and other pollutants and given that education on environmental stewardship is the first step in promoting an active and responsible population, to the minister of environment: why does this curriculum fail to teach students about rural sustainability and environmental responsibility in our forestry . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Parks has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, the NDP's curriculum never had forestry within it either. [interjections] No, it did not. But further to that, you know, what's really exciting is the great work that's taking place in the forestry industry in our province, which is leading the way towards the economic recovery that our province is headed to now that we are opening up. We're proud of our Agriculture and Forestry minister for the hard work that they're doing, but most importantly, we're proud of the hard-working men and women inside the forestry industry, who are helping lead Alberta's recovery. That's what the NDP don't want to talk about inside the Chamber. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has had her chance.
Calgary-Klein.

Federal Equalization Program Referendum

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week the Premier introduced a motion seeking approval to hold a referendum on whether Albertans think the principle of equalization should be removed from Canada's Constitution. A referendum on equalization is Alberta's opportunity to make a strong statement about our economic interest to the federal government. To the minister: what does the equalization referendum mean for Albertans and to our economy?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I ran in several elections together with a strong commitment to stand up for Alberta's interests in Ottawa. The fact is that Trudeau's current equalization formula does not serve the interests of Albertans. Billions of dollars have been transferred out of Alberta every year, even during tough economic times. The NDP agreed with the current equalization formula, and they're fine with sending billions of dollars out of province. Our government is not, and that's why Albertans will finally have their say in the fall's referendum.

The Speaker: Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the minister and I have knocked on a lot of doors and heard concerns from Albertans about the fairness of equalization and given that equalization is fundamentally unfair to Albertans, pulling billions out of our province, even during times of economic hardship, to the same minister: in the fall, if the equalization referendum is supported, what is the next course of action Albertans can expect to see?

2:30

Mr. Panda: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier said, unlike the NDP you won't see our government pre-emptively surrender to Trudeau on equalization. Quote: I'm kind of agnostic, I guess, in terms of the transfer payments that are currently in place. That's what the Member for Calgary-Buffalo said in 2015 in this House. This referendum is about giving Albertans a seat at the table. This is another promise made, another promise kept.

The Speaker: Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta has contributed more than \$400 billion over the last 25 years to the federal government through transfers to the rest of Canada and given that equalization is the government of Canada's transfer program for addressing fiscal differences between our provinces and further given that Albertans fund equalization through federal tax contributions even in times of economic challenges, to the same minister: if supported, how can we expect that the equalization referendum will affect Albertans into the future?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, a yes result would compel Alberta's Legislature to ratify a proposed constitutional amendment, which would then be sent to the government of Canada, requesting their ratification, and the federal government will be forced to engage in good-faith negotiations on the question of equalization in the Constitution. There is a sound precedent for this based on Quebec's secession reference to the Supreme Court of Canada in 1998.

Workplace Racism, Discrimination, and Harassment

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to express my sincere condolences to everyone who is grieving the loss of the four family

members to a tragic act of anti-Muslim terrorism in London this week.

This instance should serve as a reminder to all members of this Assembly that we need to be antiracist in all areas. Indigenous, racialized, and ethnically diverse individuals often face racism and hate in our workplaces, and we heard loud and clear in our antiracism consultation that this is a workplace safety issue. What specific steps has the Minister of Labour and Immigration taken to increase the safety of indigenous, racialized, and ethnically diverse Albertans in their workplaces?

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

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. I also express my condolences to the family and all those who are impacted by that tragedy that happened in London earlier this week.

You know, our government and myself and Labour and Immigration, also working with a number of my colleagues, are reviewing currently the antiracism report. That will be coming out shortly under the minister of status of women, multiculturalism. In addition, our department is focused on making Alberta a more welcoming place for newcomers. We have a number of programs that we provide out to the communities to be able to welcome newcomers, and I can speak . . .

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

Ms Gray: Given that yesterday this Assembly called on the government to combat all forms of bigotry and hatred and given that we've seen no evidence that the government has taken steps at all towards combatting racism and given that we the NDP have undertaken meaningful and thorough consultation with indigenous, racialized, and ethnically diverse Albertans over the last few months and have heard time and again that Albertans do not feel safe or supported in their workplaces when facing racism, to the same minister. These actions need to start with the government. How is this government supporting Albertans who are facing discrimination, harassment, and racism in the workplace?

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much for the question, and thank you to the member, again, for bringing up these really, really important issues. I'm very pleased to be able to talk about next steps in eliminating racism. Again – and I would throw back to our Minister of Labour and Immigration and the incredible work that's been done there – the recommendations are under review, but, as you can imagine, there are very substantive pieces that need to come forward. We're very grateful for the work that has been done through the multiple ministries that this has impacted. Ministers are actually meeting with the council coming up here fairly shortly to discuss the recommendations related to their ministries. If I get another question, I'll continue on with . . .

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

Ms Gray: Given that combatting racism in the workplace will take strong leadership and given that combatting racism and hate in the workplace includes ensuring that all workplaces reflect the diversity of Alberta and given that we heard loud and clear from indigenous, racialized, and ethnically diverse Albertans that this will require adjusting the recruiting, hiring, training, and promotion policies, to the ministers involved. Our party is committed to

ensuring that these policies are adjusted throughout the government in the government's own hiring and recruitment. Will this government do the same? If so, when?

Mrs. Aheer: Great questions. Thank you so much. Obviously, it's an imperative piece of all corporate culture, everything right across the province, that we're doing everything we can to embrace and open the doors and fling them wide open to really, really engage and make sure that people feel safe to work in these workplaces.

But I'd like to also mention, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Calgary-McCall yesterday threatened to actually release the draft report that had come through before the new co-chairs had looked at it under ARAC. This complete undermining of government policy is disingenuous and despicable and does nothing for racism.

Affordable Child Care

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, it's no doubt that the importance of accessible, affordable, quality child care and early learning has been brought to the forefront because of the pandemic. There's a lot of anxiety around these conversations because instead of renewing or expanding our NDP government's \$25-a-day child care pilot program, this UCP government just cancelled it, leaving families and child care centres with little to no new funding in many instances. Why is the minister ignoring the conversation about affordable child care when the whole country is talking about it, and why is she taking away quality, affordable options for Albertans in the process?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I'm not sure what the member opposite is talking about. I'm a little confused by some of his questions because I heard him say today that we need to make sure that those who are most in need have access to high-quality, safe, affordable child care, and under their pilot it was offered to a select few parents, parents making \$200,000, \$500,000, and \$750,000 a year. It wasn't supporting rural families. It wasn't supporting those families accessing day homes. It certainly wasn't going to support shift-working families who needed things like overnight care. That is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that earlier this year the federal government announced a \$30 billion investment over the next five years to ensure all Canadians have access to affordable, quality child care and early learning and given that this budget line item was no surprise but since the UCP had no plan ready on how they would roll out the funding to all families, why has the minister failed to give Albertans any real direction on how this government is going to leverage that federal funding to ensure universal \$10-a-day child care rolls out for all Albertans?

We could do better without the rhetoric. Thank you.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's not rhetoric; it's fact. Instead of a select few parents, those making up to \$800,000 a year, accessing \$25-a-day spaces because sometimes parents with those resources know how to access wait-lists, what we have done is shift the supports to those who need it most so that parents right now here in Alberta, low-income parents, can access child care for as low as \$13 a day – not \$25; \$13 – in the centre of their choice no matter where they live in this province. As I've said a number of times before, child care is absolutely necessary to our

economic recovery, and we are looking forward to these negotiations with the federal government.

Mr. Carson: Given that this minister, again, had plenty of time to come up with a plan but we see nothing here months later and given that the federal government's investment came only a month after this government cancelled the NDP's \$25-a-day child care pilot and given that Albertans are begging for affordable child care and this government turned their nose up at that federal funding, calling it cookie cutter, will the minister give Albertans some idea, any idea, on what the plan is for this money and give us some transparency, any accountability? Let's not leave this money on the table. Albertan families are expecting you, Minister, to do better.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I honestly have no idea what the member opposite is talking about. We are looking forward to negotiations with the federal government. Every single province in the country is looking for some flexibility in those plans to meet the needs of parents and children right across their province. I mean, here in Alberta what did the members opposite do? They picked and chose a select few centres, meaning a select few number of parents could access these supports. You know, what we want to make sure is that we can offer supports to families and to operators right across this province so that we can meet the demands of Alberta working parents.

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

School Construction, Maintenance, and Renewal

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents of Calgary-North and Albertans have demanded that our government continue to invest in schools and postsecondaries to ensure our next generation is set up for success. From elementary to university there are schools being built or undergoing maintenance to ensure that our students have the best possible learning environment. Can the Minister of Infrastructure provide an update on the north Calgary high school project to confirm whether we are on track for a summer 2023 opening for 1,800 students?

2:40

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, yes, we are on track. I apologize for the construction jargon, but he's an engineer. About 8 per cent of the total budget has been spent on grade beams. Pile caps have been formed and are ready for rebar, damp proofing of completed grade beams is ongoing, below-grade insulation is being installed, brick ledge installation is ongoing, and interior underground plumbing has begun. A masonry contractor has been mobilized to the site, and he's expected to start laying blocks next week.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that many schools across the province are in various states of disrepair and further given that this government has claimed that capital maintenance and renewal projects are a good way to create jobs in the short term and to preserve the value of the school buildings, can the Minister of Infrastructure also update this House regarding the capital maintenance and renewal school projects?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, on top of the \$106 million plan to spend, we accelerated an additional \$250 million for school CMR projects last year, creating thousands of jobs, completing much-needed upgrades, and over the next three years we'll be spending \$203

million, which totals out to \$559 million, so more than half a billion dollars on capital maintenance and renewal on schools alone between 2020 and 2024. We have made a very real commitment to maintain and renew our school buildings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that some communities are growing fast and existing schools are insufficient to meet their needs and further given that Alberta's fiscal situation is bleak, with billions of dollars in deficit spending in this past year alone, can the same minister please inform us on what he's doing to build new schools in a way that is more affordable for taxpayers?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we have a great need for new schools in many communities, but we need to bear in mind the skyrocketing debt and deficit. That's why I was pleased to announce that five new schools will be built using a P3 model, which will keep costs down while ensuring students have spaces to learn. The NDP doesn't like P3s. They have gone too far in calling them privatized schools. But I can reassure Albertans that these P3 schools will be open to all students in the province while providing cost certainty and value for taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment the member for his strong advocacy on behalf of his constituents.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 2:16 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Certainly, temperatures get hot. Lots of back and forth today; a very raucous debate. But my concern was that the Minister of Energy in responding to a question from the Member for Lethbridge-West essentially dismissed her entire question and referred to her question as hysterical ranting and suggested that she couldn't hear the question because of that hysterical ranting.

First, I would like to submit that she couldn't hear the question because her Minister of Health was heckling the entire time through that question. Second, the terms "hysterical" and "hysterical ranting" are historically gendered language. It's an old-fashioned Freudian term, but throughout history it has meant something very specific. Calling someone hysterical is akin to calling them crazy. Calling someone crazy in this House is to dismiss who they are and what they have to say without regard for the arguments that they're making.

I realize that we do not have a list of unparliamentary words, but calling somebody's question in question period, that they delivered in an appropriate tone, hysterical ranting creates disorder in this House and is abusive of this parliament and disrespects the members involved. I would ask the Minister of Energy to apologize and withdraw and, hopefully, return to debating the merits rather than that type of gendered language.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in looking at what I understood I said, "I can hardly hear the question with all the hysteria and hysterical ranting and [raving]." I'm looking at the definition and the synonyms for hysterical, hysteria. It's loud. It's

excited. It's mad and angry. It also applies to laughter, instantaneous bursts of laughter. It also applies to distraught, deeply hurt, and saddened.

I would also note that when the NDP were in government, they didn't think the term was inappropriate. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, on April 5, 2016, made repeated use of the term "hysterical" when referring to Conservative members. That can be found in three of her responses to questions that day, asking questions, interestingly, on – it looks like it's on energy policies.

Mr. Speaker, the use of the term "hysteria" is a matter of debate. There are many definitions for it. I can hardly think that it would be a gendered thing. I'm wearing pink today, and I don't think I would be using gender-based language. Hysteria means loud and excited, angry, and it's – I think some of those terms would describe the level of loudness during that question coming from the entire Assembly. The question in here and my response wasn't directed to an individual person. It was directed to the tone and rancour in this Assembly as a whole, and I think that's a matter that should be dealt with in a more appropriate manner. I think that speaks volumes to the level of debate in this Chamber and is something that should be rectified. It's not a point of order. It's a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there others? I am prepared to rule.

While I will be the first to admit that I am no expert on gender-based language, if the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader wants to provide me some information at a later time so that I might be more educated on these sorts of things, I would be happy to accept that from her in terms of sort of the overall use of the word.

Having said that, I think that the hon. the Minister of Energy has also provided some other context where members of the NDP caucus have used similar sort of language. While I don't know the entirety of that context, I would suggest that this isn't a point of order with respect to the use of that language in the context in which it was used today.

Having said that, I have some long-standing experience in and around this Chamber over the last seven years as a member and previously as a staffer and as a long-time political observer, and at no point in time have I ever seen a member of this Assembly make an accusation about a Premier getting hammered or any other member of this Assembly. I would suggest that making accusations, no matter the political context or frustrations that are around them – and I understand in the fullest of ways just how charged that event was. But to make an accusation that a member of this Assembly, and in particular the Premier, is getting hammered at any time would be wildly inappropriate. In the strongest possible of ways if there was a point of order that occurred during that particular exchange, I would suggest that that was it.

I hope that all members will govern themselves accordingly in the future, and I will be more than happy to connect with the Official Opposition House Leader to understand the potentiality of gender-based language.

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

Ordres du jour.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 67

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. This amendment was moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Are there any members wishing to join debate on amendment A1? Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to address A1, which is before us. Just so we are talking about the same thing, it has to do with changing or inserting membership requirements as they currently exist by expanding to include a number of members representing different designated trades on the employer side and the employee side and then those interested employers of persons who are employed in industries other than designated trades and then also employees in industries other than designated trades. This was up for debate, I believe, last night. It was introduced, and a couple of my colleagues, at least, talked to this and had a response back from the minister with regard to this amendment. I think this is the second time I've had the opportunity to stand up and talk about or debate Bill 67.

Of course, it's replacing the AIT, the previous bill, in a pretty substantial way. There is of course a need and a desire, I think, generally, to update, to modernize what's before us as the previous bill is long standing in terms of its tenure in this Legislature. This bill will replace that. Of course, apprenticeships are an important part of the postsecondary system in this province. Apprenticeships are long standing in nature.

We heard in previous debate about the panel that worked with the minister, where a report was drawn from or a summary of their work was put into a report. We heard, not from the report but from debate previously, where apprenticeship systems exist and were understood and recognized and looked at in at least four jurisdictions in the world: Germany, the U.K., I think it was Taiwan, but I could be wrong, and one other jurisdiction, which just eludes me at this point in time. There's a long-standing history of the benefits of having apprentices work with skilled tradespeople around the world.

In Canada, obviously, because we are a young country, we don't have that long-standing history, though we do have excellent tradespeople. Their ability to train and teach younger generations of people, to continue that as their profession is a good thing. We do know that as tradespeople age, they need to be replaced, and there's a great need in making that happen to ensure that we have all the people who need to pipe fit, need to plumb, need to do electrical, need to do all of the things that put structures together and keep us safe.

Madam Chair, what my colleagues and I have talked about is ensuring that we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater, that we keep some of the good things that were evident in the way the previous system worked, that we ensure that the people who have a stake in the necessary training of tradespeople through apprenticeships and other kinds of instruction have a say in that so that, you know, the sound information, the sound advice, the sound lived experience of those who have done the work, those who have employed the workers continues to be at the table. Now, I don't think that's a bad thing. I think that continuing to draw on those people in an instructive way is beneficial for apprentices now and into the future.

I think that we have heard specifically from the jurisdiction of British Columbia that they have made some significant changes to their systems in the last 15 years and that those changes have in fact been problematic, and there are concerns. We want to address that

pre-emptively instead of seeing things go down the same road. We're talking about ensuring that stakeholders' concerns about the removal of mandatory trade involvement on the board be addressed up front. We think that that's a common-sense thing to continue to do. I don't see it as a prescriptive thing. I see it as continuing to draw on the abilities and skills of people who have been there before, employers of designated trades areas and nondesignated trades areas, to ensure that they're at the table.

I think that there can be potentially a reworking of our amendment if the minister sees some benefit in it to improve it. I would welcome that if that is something that the minister wants to do. I think that the amendment would continue to ensure that we have a modern apprenticeship system in this province, where skilled trades and education for apprenticeships continues in a way that is modern, updated, and fits into the ideas that are in Bill 67. We, of course, know that the kind of addition that I'm talking to would just be a part of the greater whole that is here in the act. It's not something that'll break the act. It's not something that would change it. It is something that would add to a vibrant bill that is modernized and provides a new ecosystem, if you would, of apprenticeship training in this province.

3:00

Madam Chair, those are some of my initial thoughts about why this amendment should be upheld and accepted. I believe that it was made in the spirit of trying to stick with the main thrust of the bill but also keep the good parts of governance that were there in the past and that have served us and can continue to be flexible and agile and nimble in the future, as it needs to be, so that we really fill the vacancy that's going to be there.

One of the government members on the other side I think said that there was going to be a gap of 45,000 skilled tradespeople in this province. I can't remember the time frame, but with that challenge before us we need to keep employers onside, because they really provide, obviously, the working opportunities. We need to keep the employers onside. We need to keep representatives of employees onside as well in the designated trades and nondesignated trades. Keeping them on this sort of board would ensure that not only the lived experience but the good intel that comes from their presence can be quickly understood and delivered and acted on as we go forward.

Madam Chair, those are, again, some of the concerns that I want to underline, that previous colleagues have talked about in debate. I look forward to any response that the minister may want to deliver in that regard. I think, as I said, there's a lot to be said about keeping that experience around the table.

I'll end off at this point. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:03 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Feehan	Hoffman
Dach	Gray	Loyola

3:20

Against the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Singh
Amery	Nally	Smith
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Neudorf	Stephan
Copping	Nicolaides	Toews
Ellis	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Fir	Panda	Turton
Hanson	Rowswell	van Dijken
Horner	Rutherford	Walker
Issik	Savage	Williams
Jones	Schulz	Yaseen
Long	Sigurdson, R.J.	

Totals: For – 6 Against – 32

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 67. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise at Committee of the Whole to debate Bill 67. I did have the opportunity to speak to it at second reading. I'll just recap my major comments, and then I have a number of questions, now that we're into the detailed debate on this bill, that I hope through Committee of the Whole we'll be able to get some clarity on.

Bill 67 is a large, large, large amount of change to our skilled trades and apprenticeship system, but what Bill 67 truly represents is a consolidation of power to the minister and a deferral of decision-making to regulations. So this bill becomes enabling legislation. It enables the minister to create a new framework. It enables the minister to make some very big, potentially broad changes to the systems.

I found it very difficult in talking to stakeholders who are directly impacted by this bill, because the answer is that this bill could be used to do amazing things, and this bill could be used to do horrible things. Right now, as we are debating this bill, I can't read what's in these pages and let somebody know if this bill will impact them positively or negatively because so much of it is deferred to regulation. It's just not there. There's no way to tell how it will be used.

In my second reading remarks I flagged to this government, as I have on so many other bills, that when you consolidate power to the minister, when you defer so much to regulation, not only are you empowering your current government, but you are empowering all future governments to do the same. It really removes transparency, and I will say that it very, very much worries stakeholders. In the middle of a pandemic we now have a lot of people who are worried about potential devaluing of their current trades certificates.

I'd like to start, perhaps, by posing some very high-level questions, knowing that there are a number of stakeholders who are either watching this live or will be reading the *Hansard* debate on this to try and glean more information about the intentions of this government. One of the big changes that is in this bill that was not in the skills for jobs report was that this bill removes compulsory trades. The removal of the compulsory trades system could have very, very negative repercussions. We've seen that in B.C., where they removed compulsory trades in 2003, it has not been positive. The government of the day is now currently in major talks to bring the compulsory trades system back in.

So along that topic, I'd like to ask – right now compulsory trades are being removed from this act. That's going to impact a number of compulsory trades, everything from client service technicians to

boilermakers to electricians to ironworkers, welders, steamfitters, pipefitters, and others. My question is: will current compulsory trades be grandfathered, be protected in the way that they are now, or through Bill 67 will current compulsory trades start to become watered down?

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join debate? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to respond to the question and some of the other comments as well. I just want to clarify that, you know, the Skills for Jobs Task Force did talk about providing more flexibility over the designation between compulsory and noncompulsory trades. We have a very rigid model right now over that designation, and that designation needs to happen, actually, through an order in council. That needs to happen by cabinet. We recognize that in a fast-paced economy and in a changing landscape we need to give employers and trades professionals more flexibility to determine appropriate pathways and to determine what type of level of certification is most appropriate for them, whether that's compulsory or not. We're actually creating more flexibility and removing red tape in that process so that the new board can make that determination as needed, as per the advice of those skilled trades professionals and those employers and other professionals.

Furthermore, I also just want to comment and respond. I know that the member commented that she's hearing from some individuals that they're maybe worried or that there is some worry about a devaluation of their trades certificate. I hope that's not the case because, actually, what's established within this legislation is what is a very exciting and could potentially be a groundbreaking development when it comes to the valuation of trades certificates. One of the things that is established within the legislation is that it gives the government the ability to create academic recognition and academic equivalency for trades certificates, which doesn't exist right now and I don't believe exists anywhere else in the country.

I just want to point this out a little bit more clearly. When you complete a journeyman certificate, that receives almost no credit recognition. If you complete your journeyman certificate and then you want to attend a local college or a university or a polytechnic and pursue other educational opportunities, you receive little to almost no credit for that previous learning. Through the changes that we are establishing within the bill, we will be able to subsequently make changes to Alberta's credential framework and work with our postsecondary institutions so that a journeyman certificate will receive academic recognition. Now a person with a journeyman certificate can continue on or can take a program at a college or polytechnic or other institution and receive recognition for that previous learning. That opens up the door and creates many more opportunities for our skilled trades professionals to build their skills, to reach new heights, and to achieve more opportunities.

Just coming back, when it comes to the determination between compulsory and noncompulsory, the new board as well as I as minister will be working very carefully with our trades professionals to get those designations right. There's no intention, from my part at least, to just make arbitrary designations. The whole model is designed to create more flexibility. I often at times as minister get requests from groups who believe that a certain practice should become a compulsory trade.

Again, part of the other problem is that the current model that we have requires that if we are going to designate a new trade, it does need to fit into a very defined box. It doesn't allow for more flexible solutions. This will allow for more flexible pathways. Even if we are looking at new areas to be designated as trades, it allows us to

be more responsive as well. There are certain instances, where I've heard from others as well, where a certain practice should not be designated as a trade, and the industry supports that.

3:30

Rather than that, going through a very complicated government bureaucratic process and coming to cabinet and requiring cabinet approval and all that, we want to give much more of that power and authority and guidance to the board, who will be comprised of experts and individuals that are in this area to be able to make those decisions.

I'm confident the member opposite has more questions, but I'll sit down there, because I know it's always dangerous when any politician gets a microphone – they just go on and on and on – so I'll try and limit myself. Happy to hear more questions.

The Chair: I've never known that to be true.

Ms Gray: I appreciate the minister responding on the record on these issues, and I appreciate the minister trying to be brief because I do have a number, that I hope we are able to get through. In your last answer – so the question being: will the current compulsory trades ...

The Chair: Hon. member – sorry – I'll just remind you to direct your comments through the chair despite the back and forth, which I'm happy to facilitate.

Ms Gray: I appreciate that, Madam Chair.

My question originally was: will current compulsory trades be grandfathered? The answer that I've heard is: not any designated grandfathering; instead, the board will review. The board, which is currently – the current version is going to be essentially ended. This legislation changes it so that the board will now be made up entirely of people of the minister's choosing, and this ties directly to the amendment that was just defeated. The Official Opposition put forward an amendment to ensure that there was balanced representation from all of the groups impacted by this, a very difficult task to do.

But I will suggest that there are a number of concerns that this is being left entirely to the discretion of the minister: compulsory trades won't be grandfathered, the board will decide, but the minister gets to decide who is on the board, and we need to trust that he will pick the right people and have the right balance. So this is an area of concern. I think that stakeholders watching who are currently members of compulsory trades likely would have liked to have heard that their compulsory trade will be essentially grandfathered or continue to remain the way it is, but that's not the answer we received, and the minister is – happy to be corrected if any of that is incorrect. The conclusion that the minister choosing could be bad: obviously, the minister will suggest that that is actually quite great and that he will do a fabulous job of picking people. This is where we get into matters of trust.

I would now like to move on to a slightly different piece. On page 6 of the bill, in the descriptions of the apprenticeship education programs and the industry training programs, there's a clear difference between the two in that the industry training programs have zero classroom components. Classroom instruction is not even mentioned in what the minister may set up for these particular programs. I had hoped that the minister may be able to clearly describe why industry training programs have no classroom component whatsoever because, based on the conversations that I've had with many, there was some surprise at that. Understanding the intention behind industry training programs would be helpful.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you. I'll try to be brief. I really will. I promise. I missed part of that apology, so perhaps it'll come back to me. Oh, yes. On the board: it's not that far off from what's currently in the AIT Act. The AIT Act does say: you know, there must be X number of employers and employees, et cetera, et cetera. Still, there's wide discretion there about who is chosen. That happens through an order in council. Again, the government can appoint whoever they want in that regard, so it's the same practice. We've tried to reduce some red tape in that regard. Rather than have those appointments happen through order in council, they'll be appointed by the minister. Of course, we have to and will ensure that when we develop the new board, we have employers and employees and other key individuals there to ensure that we have broad representation to create a strong board that will help govern our trades and our apprenticeship system, which is essential.

On the question about on-the-job training: this is a provision that already exists within the AIT Act, so this is a carry-over. There is a provision within the AIT Act that does allow – you know, in very certain circumstances, for an employer that says, “We need very specialized and nuanced on-the-job training to involve X, Y, and Z,” they can do that with little to no classroom instruction. That already exists. That's current practice, so we're carrying that over within the new act and just making it a little bit more clear as well within Bill 67.

As well, I also just wanted to comment. You know, going back to the comment about compulsory trades versus noncompulsory, we have changed the categorization, of course, as the member noted, between restricted and nonrestricted. We highly anticipate that most of the compulsory will just carry over into the category of restricted activities unless otherwise noted. Again, we'll be working very closely with the board to help make those next steps and those determinations.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Even just the commitment that most compulsory trades will carry over into restricted: I think that's the kind of language that some of the trade unions who are watching the debate and reading *Hansard* are looking for.

Earlier in the debate the minister suggested that credential recognition is entirely new in Bill 67. I do just want to flag, for those following the debate at home, that even now, under the current system, if someone is a journeyman electrician and they start a new apprenticeship as an instrumentation tech, they do get credit for the education they've already had within that system although I understand that Bill 67 is broadening that and expanding it. That is certainly a positive thing.

Coming back to various questions, the minister, when he has a moment – again, the difference between apprenticeship education programs and industry training programs and why the industry training programs don't have a classroom component still isn't fully clear for me.

I'm also curious. On page 6, section 4(1)(b): “engage or approve persons or entities to provide training to trainees in industry training programs.” I just want to make sure that I'm clear. You will be able to designate private organizations, like, private companies, to be able to do training going forward based on this bill, correct?

Mr. Nicolaides: Sorry. I didn't hear the page or section reference. I think you were referring to the description or the categorization of sponsors and what that would capture. Yes. The idea there – again, currently within the AIT Act there are very narrow categorizations of who can indenture apprentices, essentially, and who can take on

that responsibility. It's narrowly defined as employers within the AIT Act. We're expanding that definition under the term “sponsors,” so that will open up the doors for private organizations, nonprofit entities, consortiums, or others to be able to indenture apprentices, which is an important step forward.

Furthermore, on the point of academic recognition, yes, there is some recognition. It is very limited, but through the changes that we'll be making, we'll be able to take that quite a significant step further.

As well, just coming back to the designation of trades, you know, on average, from what I understand from officials within my team, it takes anywhere from – it takes a number of years. It takes four to eight years to designate a new trade at a cabinet level. There needs to be extensive industry engagement and discussion as part of that process, so we want to remove red tape in that regard and help streamline that process so that if industry and other professionals really believe that a particular activity should be designated as a compulsory trade or that it should not be, there's a more streamlined pathway and as well more clear guidelines as to what the criteria are to be able to do that. I'm confident this will help streamline activities as well.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair, for keeping us organized. I have a question about the bill on page 11, section 9(1), general responsibilities of the minister: “The Minister is responsible for the administration of this Part and for general administrative matters with respect to apprenticeship education programs, industry training programs and the issuance of credentials.” I really just wanted to make sure I understood the use of the word “credentials” in this section, because as I've worked my way through the bill – in this context, does this relate to trade tickets?

Thank you.

3:40

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. The short answer is yes. That's the journeyman credential and other credentials as well, recognizing, as we're looking at this within the lens of expanding apprenticeship opportunities and creating new apprenticeships, that the issuing of credentials will be necessary in that regard.

I realize as well – a very quick point; I forgot to comment – that the member was asking again for a little more detail around on-the-job training and in that categorization. Again, I'll try and see if I can pull together an example throughout the course of the debate because I don't have one directly in front of me, but as I mentioned, there are certain circumstances where an employer needs or requires specialized training in a particular area that's very, very nuanced. The employer just delivers that, and the training is complete. Those are very special instances and categorizations. Again, those already occur. There's not a requirement in that instance for educational programming. It's not to say that, you know, the intent is to remove educational programming or requirements from any of the current trades or apprenticeship programming but just recognizing that in those very nuanced instances that may be required.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much in regard to that question and that word “credentials.” I appreciate that.

On page 11 as well I really just need to emphasize that section 10 is regulations for part 1 and reads, “The Lieutenant Governor in

Council may make regulations.” Then there are a number of ways the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations and the minister may make regulations. I really just want to flag this section because this section is the meat of what Bill 67 will do, but it’s deferred to the future.

For those who are watching at home, this is one of my concerns as a member of the Official Opposition, because so much of this is being deferred to regulation and the minister having said that he will consult widely and broadly – that consultation hasn’t happened yet. We’ve got the major changes happening to the system, everybody knows change is coming, Bill 67 is going to be passed, and then we don’t know what the end result is going to look like, what the regulations will look like. I suspect that people will be wondering how long that might take – I’m going to flag that as a question – to develop the regulations. Will every organization who’s interested in participating be able to? How will, because there are so many diverse trade unions and trades that are impacted by this as well as employers – like, it’s a big, big system, so getting this right is the key to making sure Bill 67 is positive for Alberta versus the potential negative consequences. I cannot underemphasize how important the regulations are going to be.

On that point, I think I will just pause because I’d love to hear from the minister how he will make sure that these regulations are developed fairly, in a way that engages everyone impacted, that is able to reflect back the positive possibilities of this bill, because right now so much of this of this is deferred to the future. Honestly, from the Official Opposition’s perspective, it’s very much: “Please trust us. We’ll do the right thing. You can count on us.” From the Official Opposition’s perspective: very difficult for us to do. Nothing personal to the minister, of course, but that is certainly a challenge from our perspective as we’re looking at this and trying to explain to stakeholders what might happen or what impact this could have for them.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Yeah. No worries. I’m not taking anything personally and, of course, recognize and understand the member’s concerns as an opposition party would have those concerns.

Broadly, the member is right, of course. We’ve separated the bill into, well, many parts, but of the first two parts, the first deals with apprenticeship education, and the second deals with trades. Then underneath each of those parts is giving the minister the ability to develop regulations that affect trades and that affect apprenticeship education.

One of the other important things that this bill is doing is separating apprenticeship education from trades. Currently if you are in an apprenticeship program, that leads to a trade. They’re almost synonymous. We wanted to look at, as I mentioned earlier, future and more modern and dynamic applications of apprenticeship so that you can learn a career or a profession through an apprenticeship style of education, which is learning by working, without it necessarily having to lead to a trade.

We have to make that separation, and then we have to develop regulation that governs that distinction. I unfortunately don’t have the specifics directly in front of me, but I’m happy to get back to the member and other stakeholders that are watching, about the precise timelines. I believe it’s this month we plan to begin the engagement efforts. Just a quick step back: the intent is to use the next couple of months to engage. As the member mentioned, there are many stakeholders.

We want to use the next couple of months to engage widely and broadly on the development of the regulations that are associated with this bill. If memory serves me correctly, we’ll be kicking off

that engagement effort this month, and that’ll continue on for the next couple of months. We’re looking at surveys, discussion, round-tables. I’m trying to recall from the briefing material that we had agreed upon with officials in the department. A multipronged approach, I guess is what I’m trying to articulate, will be implemented over the course of the next couple of months to get feedback from employers, employees, unions, and others that are involved in Alberta’s apprenticeship system. More to come and more for interested parties to be able to contribute in the next few months.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Continuing to look at the bill on page 14, section 13, this is all about the Alberta board of skilled trades. Again, the minister has mentioned he already has a lot of discussion on who he appoints to the board. The Official Opposition proposed an amendment wanting to keep some of those important categories, making sure we have equal representation from different stakeholder groups that are impacted by this bill. That’s not what will go forward in this current version of the bill.

My question is specific to the board because the board does do so many important things. In fact, you just tabled the annual report. That was, I think, just last week. I can’t quite tell through this legislation, but right now the annual report includes goals, strategies, as well as key performance measures. I mention the key performance measures and indicators specifically because we’ve seen the business plans here from the Alberta government across two, three now – a lot of those detailed performance measures have been taken out in an effort to streamline or what have you.

Looking at the types of things that are currently measured, can the minister commit that these things will continue to be measured and reported on? Data like the number of apprenticeship graduates and whether they’re employed, all of these things that are currently measured, would be incredibly important to compare today’s system to the changes in the future. “Will these annual reports continue to come out with the same level of detail?” is my question for the minister.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I mean, it’s hard to say because of course the board is the one who develops and produces the report. Yes, of course, that’s signed off on and approved by the ministry. I think, as the member opposite will know, I believe strongly in key performance indicators and performance measures and evaluating those. In fact, we’re shifting the entire funding model for our postsecondary system to focus on key performance indicators and performance outcomes. I highly suspect we’ll continue to report on important indicators.

I also think there’s an opportunity, as we’re engaging in this process, to have a look at those indicators and have a look at the annual reports that are being generated and look at them with a critical eye to make sure that we’re reporting on the right things. Obviously, that’s not a level of nuance or detail that one would detail in legislation about how a board or an agency would produce its annual report. I understand the member’s question irrespective of that, and I do think it’s incredibly important that we have robust reports to monitor, evaluate, and track the success and progress of our trades and apprenticeship system more broadly.

3:50

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Continuing on about the various powers and functions of the board, on page 15, section 14(2)(c), talking about what the board may do. The board may make orders, and (c) is “recognizing documents issued outside Alberta as being the equivalent of a trade certificate, if the Board considers it appropriate to do so.” Specifically, this is an area that I’m not as familiar with, whether the board currently has that power. Certainly, through stakeholders it’s been raised to me that this could be a very, very big issue for our brothers and sisters in the trades. Through (2)(c) will the board be able to open up a window for more temporary foreign workers to be brought in when there’s a trade shortage? Through this clause, it’s my understanding, the trade certificates from Poland or Venezuela or Louisiana could just be deemed good enough, and then those workers come into Alberta. Obviously, I’m asking this with a jobs focus in mind and the impact to our Alberta tradespeople if those certificates – like, if you could please talk a little bit about how the board might be using this and the potential impacts to our Alberta tradesmen and -women.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Madam Chair. The intent here is, of course, to ensure that harmonization efforts and activities continue across Canada in terms of harmonization of trades certificates and other trades credentials. I don’t see a strong scenario where the member’s concerns can be played out, recognizing that acceptance of immigration protocols and standards and the temporary foreign worker program are matters that are subject to the federal government. We do have the ability as a province and as we do here to determine how we recognize credentials from outside of Alberta, but there are still limits that the federal government establishes on immigration policy more broadly. The intent here, as I mentioned, is to continue to ensure that we’re working with other provinces to ensure harmonization of trade certificates.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. On page 17 of this, section 16, assistance to the board and committees, it talks about various things, materials and other resources, including funding, that the minister may provide to the board. The idea of costing to me is interesting, especially given how big the systemic changes are from the current trade system to the future trade system. I wanted to ask the minister what costing comparisons have been done. At this point are you confident that the changes happening in Bill 67 will save money overall? Compared to the current act, what will happen in terms of costs? Is this a blank cheque? What will this look like going forward?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. Madam Chair, I don’t anticipate major cost implications as a result of the changes in the bill. In fact, I anticipate the opposite. As I mentioned earlier, one of the lenses or the foundational principles that we looked at in developing the new legislation was an eye towards red tape reduction, streamlining processes more broadly, and creating a more flexible and nimble system. Of course, I think we can all agree that when people are able to spend less time filling in reports or applications, they’re able to focus more on other areas of priority. That helps strengthen productivity and reduce unnecessary costs, you know, an organization needing to hire someone to fill in reports and things of that nature. We are confident we’ll be able to create a more streamlined system that will save.

I’m not sure if the member was referring, you know, very, very specifically to the board and to the costing of the board. We are, of course, projecting – if memory serves me correctly, I believe the board that we’re establishing here is slightly larger than the current AIT Board. We have looked at what the costing is of the current AIT Board and the costing associated with travel and other activities for those board members, and we’re projecting a state of equivalency of costing for the board itself. On a more broad level, I anticipate that through a lot of the red tape reduction efforts and through streamlining processes we’ll be able to create a more efficient system and save dollars here as well.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. In my debate at second reading one of the things I introduced into the debate was the concern that Bill 67 could potentially be used to go down the path of microcredentialling. During that debate I know that one of the members from the government was puzzled: the word “microcredentialling” isn’t in here. I wanted to just get on the record clearly where this concern is coming from. It’s from the concept of an endorsement, which will have the meaning ascribed to it in regulation. This is an example of a thing that is in the bill, but we don’t actually know what it is because the regulations haven’t been written yet. That endorsement could potentially be a form of microcredentialling, which would be incredibly concerning to a lot of our trades. Now, the endorsement could potentially be an improvement if it was an add-on to a journeyman certificate or another system like that, but I wanted to check with the minister.

Certainly, a lot of the concerns I’m hearing from stakeholders are around the very, very big question of: how will Bill 67 impact wages? Will it water down credentials and lower wages overall, and will endorsements be used to bring in a form of microcredentialling here in Alberta? These are very big questions that a lot of the people impacted by Bill 67 are concerned about. I would be happy to hear from the minister as far as his intentions.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I, you know, would encourage everyone to look at this with optimism. I don’t see an environment where the changes here could result in lower wages or watered down credentials. I mean, I could see an environment if you’re – I guess I understand the concern because if you’re thinking about it through the lens of microcredentials, if you microcredential everything, then that creates a very different environment. That’s not the intent, to do that.

You know, I don’t want to get into a big conversation about microcredentials. I think they’re something that we need to broadly consider within our higher education system. In fact, within Alberta 2030 we have talked specifically about the need to get stakeholders together and develop a microcredentialling framework for the province. I think there’s some value in microcredentials where they meet certain needs and certain training parameters, but we haven’t developed the bill or are thinking about it through the lens of using microcredentials to create all of these smaller credentials that could create challenges for individuals. Again, I think that through academic recognition there’s a tremendous opportunity to create more pathways for skilled trades professionals, that will further strengthen their skills and, I would argue, do the opposite, lead to a more robust skill set and higher wages within their professions.

Again, just to close on the microcredentialling side, yeah, that’s not the lens that we’ve looked at this through at all, but I do think that within Alberta’s higher education landscape and system more broadly we need to think about: how do microcredentials fit, how

are they delivered, who recognizes them, who issues credentials for them, and are there standards for them? Things of that nature. Those are large policy conversations that I think need to happen within the postsecondary ecosystem at a future time.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you for that, Minister. I certainly think that the word “microcredentialing,” as I’ve heard people use it, has sounded more like an expletive and potential problem. I know that if microcredentials are under discussion, there are lots of stakeholders who would want to be a part of that conversation, and certainly I invite you to engage with all of them.

4:00

The next question I have for you is: in reading the bill – I just want to make sure I understand this – will Bill 67 devolve some of the accreditation? Like, will that be brought to a lower level or a different group doing the accreditation through Bill 67?

Mr. Nicolaides: No, but I’m going to ask the member if she might be able to provide some more clarity when she means accreditation. I don’t recall changes to accreditation models that are being contemplated here. I’m sure the member might be able to provide some more clarity and details there.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. In this case, this question was forwarded to me through a stakeholder to ask during the debate, and without more detail to pass on to you right now, we’ll just know that this bill is not devolving accreditation in its current form, which I think will be appreciated.

We’ve covered a lot of ground through some of this back and forth around the ministry’s intent as well as the potential positives and negatives on Bill 67. I do want to allow some of my colleagues the opportunity to ask questions in Committee of the Whole and to discuss Bill 67. With thanks to the minister for going back and forth with me, I will say that I continue to be very skeptical and concerned about being asked to vote for a bill where I cannot describe to someone what the system will look like after this bill passes, that defers so much to regulation, and that consolidates so much power into the hands of the minister. These are really, really big issues, especially for a system as fundamental as our apprenticeship and skilled trades training system and accreditation system.

I will continue to listen and engage in debate at Committee of the Whole with a great deal of interest. I probably will think of another question or two as we go, but for now I will cede my time so that my colleagues may also ask questions around Bill 67 and its impacts here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do first want to comment that I found the debate, particularly by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, very engaging. I truly do appreciate her thoughts and contemplations on this bill and appreciate the debate she brought forward.

It is my privilege to stand here today and speak to Bill 67, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. This new act will update the 30-year-old Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act with a more modern and efficient system that will prioritize student learning in many jobs, trades, and industries. Our government is modernizing apprenticeship education and the governance of

skilled trades professions to make sure Alberta’s workforce is and remains skilled, competitive, and equipped to deal with the challenges today and in the future.

Alberta is incredibly blessed to have the workforce and jobs that we do. In order to keep our jobs and training and industry professionals, some of the best and most effective in the country and the world, we are prioritizing these changes to the current apprenticeship training model. I am extremely happy that we’re able to follow through on a campaign promise to allow the apprenticeship model to expand to other professions so that more occupations can utilize this effective form of education. Apprenticeship education is proven to strongly support student learning and success and holds as much value, merit, and worth as all forms of postsecondary education.

Particularly for me, this is very, very meaningful legislation. I’d like to share a little bit of my story as I have journeyed through the apprenticeship program. Several years ago – okay; many years ago – I began this process. There was an economic downturn in this province, and I could not find a job with my postsecondary education from the B.C. Institute of Technology as a civil engineering technologist. That was during a time where privatization of some industries occurred in Alberta. Many government workers flooded into the private sector, and I couldn’t find a job. So I began a journey as a labourer in construction. That took me on a four-year journey, at which point I received my journeyman’s ticket. I also wrote at the time my red seal journeyman’s test and received my red seal journeyman carpenter’s certification.

This led me for the next 20 some-odd years down the road of strong experience. I learned how to frame houses as well as to form and finish concrete. I did a lot of residential finishing in construction, as the member opposite has shared his experiences as a finishing carpenter as well. I learned how to hang commercial doors, and it is one of my greatest pleasures that in this building the doors to this Chamber are extremely beautiful and an incredible example of what artisans and apprentices and journeymen can accomplish. I’m very proud to be part of that trade.

I followed my career and ended up doing a lot of commercial millwork. I spent a lot of time working in finishing restaurants, from Tony Roma’s to East Side Mario’s to the Ruth’s Chris restaurant right here in Edmonton, just down the road. Nearly every piece of wood in that restaurant I and my crew installed over a decade ago, and I’m very, very proud that it is still one of the most recognized restaurants here in Edmonton.

I spent a large deal of time in commercial retail. When the Chinook mall in Calgary did their major expansion, I worked on many of those stores and spent countless hours working in those boutiques, and I’m proud that they still are around. I think that’s one of the points of pride that many journeymen experience in their careers: having built or worked on a project, being able to go by years and years later and still see that building, that store, the work that you did, with the strength of your hands, still in place.

Out of Lethbridge I have travelled to Vancouver, Toronto, Seattle, and Montreal and done installs all over Canada and North America. It was a foundation for myself in starting five businesses, four of them that are still active. I’m very happy to hear, in the debate from the member opposite and the minister, that recognition of credentials is such an essential piece in this legislation, because it allows people like me to take that experience and learn and go on to further things. In my personal circumstance, I took that experience and applied it to project management and was able to achieve my gold seal in commercial project management. From that point and that credential I was able to go back to my training from

college all those years ago and re-establish my certificate of engineering technology, and I still hold that to this day as well.

A large amount of learning and experience from what I learned allowed me to speak predominantly to the prompt-payment legislation that we as a government brought through in the past year, again, very relevant to our industry, a major concern to many in that trade. In fact, again, somewhere around 10 years ago I was appointed as one of Alberta's representatives to the Canadian Construction Association in Ottawa, where we met and spoke about prompt payment a decade ahead of what we were able to do here in Alberta. Very proud that we were able to bring that level of expertise to that table at a national level and very proud that Alberta has been able to represent itself in that way.

The information I've learned in my experience through being a skilled trade and journeyman carpenter allowed me to work on numerous schools within Alberta, on the infrastructure, learn how they work, work on how portables, which we now use in our education system, are added to that, speak to the development of safety codes and understanding safety. When you add a portable building to a fixed building, how do you handle fire codes and fire suppression, egress, HVAC, and so on and so forth?

I was able to work at numerous postsecondary education institutions. In fact, with my learning through apprenticeship and carpentry I was the project lead on bringing to the University of Lethbridge their 3T MRI, which they have in partnership with private industry, which is one of only two or three in all of Canada and one of very few in all of North America with that level of technology and ability to help diagnose patients with the need for an MRI.

4:10

I have been able to work in hospitals, work on surgical suites, work on palliative care floors, work in all kinds of different suites, which has brought an immense amount of experience and knowledge to myself to be able to bring to this Legislature: years of work with municipalities – the company I worked for won through procurement the right to work for municipalities and repair or build new buildings for the city of Lethbridge and other towns; that kind of education, again, is very relevant to the work that we do in this place and just has added to the depth and breadth of the debate that I'm able to bring – working on buildings like the police station or transportation, maintenance, and storage, and on the story goes.

As well, one final piece of the type of work that I've been able to experience in my career is working on seniors' homes, which, again, has significance in the debate and understanding of our care for seniors, what they need and how they're cared for, right down to the buildings that they now live in.

With that, I share that just to again illustrate how important it is to recognize different walks of life, ones where people start in the trades. You never know where that experience can lead them. In my case, I'm very proud to have the honour to represent Lethbridge-East and be in this Chamber.

The changes we are proposing respond to the recommendations of the Skills for Jobs Task Force, which is another campaign promise kept by the Minister of Advanced Education, and align with the Alberta 2030 building skills for job strategy to positively transform the province's postsecondary education system. One point of note: I was very pleased to hear that my former employer from Lethbridge was named to the Skills for Jobs Task Force and, again, represented Lethbridge extremely well in the development of those recommendations from the very ground level, the grassroots, from those in the industry, and I was very, very pleased on that appointment for him as well as for our province.

The new act will promote the equal value of apprenticeship education with other forms of postsecondary education and encourage more Albertans to pursue trades professions not only as an alternative option but as an equal and meaningful career. Approximately 7,800 new apprenticeships were registered in 2020, which is down slightly from the previous year, which was over 11,600. I think we can all guess as to some of the impacts and the reasons why that may have occurred, that 11,600 began their program in 2019, but still a large number of apprentices are beginning their journey in that way.

In 2020 apprentices were learning on the job at more than 11,000 employer sites across Alberta, and Advanced Education staff connected with more than 15,000 employer shops to promote apprenticeship programs and work with employers and apprentices to ensure the successful completion of apprenticeship education. More than 1,000 scholarships were awarded in Alberta to apprentices, totalling a million dollars.

Apprenticeship education has proven to strongly support student learning and access, and the apprenticeship model of learning has great potential to support professions beyond the skilled trades. Regardless of the postsecondary education someone is pursuing, we believe there should be the option to formally develop programs around apprenticeship opportunities.

We all learn in unique and different ways. For many, the hands-on portion of apprenticeship learning can make all the difference. That wasn't necessarily the case for me, but I did experience that with many men and women on their journey, where just reading from a book was challenging, not that they couldn't push through it, not that they didn't do that portion of it, but when they got into a shop, when they put their hands to a piece of wood, used the tools, they became artists, literally, in what they were able to do, and that's success. That alternative option for many of our fine people in Alberta is something that we need to develop, encourage, and promote.

It's not just how you learn; it can be who you learn from. Some of the teachers that I experienced – again, tradesmen and tradeswomen – just brought a perspective and experience that spoke a language that was a little different than the standard classroom and made all the difference. And it can be what you learn. I appreciate the depth and breadth and extensions that this bill will bring forward and the work that the Minister of Advanced Education has done in that regard.

One of the industries in Lethbridge that has spoken to me specifically about this bill is the meat-cutting industry. They are not at this point recognized as a trade, but it is a huge portion of our food and agricultural industry. Manitoba has recently added meat-cutting to their apprenticeship program, and I would be incredibly pleased to work with the Minister of Advanced Education to promote that potential trade to be adopted in Alberta as an incredible high-paying job for those who live in Alberta, those who may come and move to Alberta and to expand our presence in the food and agricultural sector.

Expanding and improving apprenticeship opportunities in our province sets the next generation of trades employees and other participating careers up for greater success. I'm incredibly grateful for my time learning in an apprenticeship situation, and thus I am fully in support of this bill and would ask everyone in this House to consider and vote for it as well.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. When last we spoke, I suggested that I would yield time to my colleagues, but I thought of

something else. In reality I was looking at the trees, and when I sat down and had a moment to step back and look at the forest again, I realized that there is a giant area that we didn't talk about at all, and that is that right now our trades system is considered industry driven. The industry network, through the provincial apprenticeship committees and the local apprenticeship committees, is hugely important, bringing knowledgeable partners together to advise the minister and to provide that professional counsel. It's a real strength of Alberta's system, and we have some incredibly high-functioning, busy, dealing-with-huge-issues provincial apprenticeship committees. The members of these committees are drawn from trades and from employers, and by having fewer knowledgeable industry participants, we very much risk the trades' training quality decreasing or health and safety decreasing.

The current act has an entire section with the committees relating to the trades that talks about the provincial apprenticeship committees, the local apprenticeship committees, what they need to be doing and sets a framework out. The new act says that the board may establish committees. That right there has caused a great deal of anxiety for those who are currently involved in this industry-driven system because the players involved see this as incredibly valuable and really important for the minister to be able to get good advice from both employers and the trades as well as not just advice, but these groups at times work on, for example, making sure that Alberta's training is red seal compliant with other provinces doing training, so big, big stuff.

Yet this bill essentially renders them optional. There may be committees. They may inform the minister, but really the minister now has the consolidated power that if the committees don't exist, that's okay too. I see this as a really big problem for stakeholders. The fact that these committees could go away entirely is a cause of great concern. I think partnership with industry is incredibly important. The fact that these committees, through legislation, have become a "may" rather than a system of value to support the minister and the decision-making – I would very much like to hear more about the potential dissolution of these important committees.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Madam Chair. Firstly, let me just say that, absolutely, an industry-driven trades and apprenticeship system is a critical pillar to the success of a vocational education system. It is absolutely critical. You can't operate one if it's not industry driven. That will absolutely be reflected.

4:20

I understand the member's concerns because, yes, in the current AIT Act the committee structure is detailed quite extensively in the bill. Of course, in this bill we've taken a very different approach. As the member said at the beginning, this is enabling legislation to give us the framework to be able to take the next steps. We didn't go, of course, with keeping a prescriptive framework around committees with the new bill because it's one of the areas that the task force did flag. They did talk extensively in the report about governance, and they continued to come back to the point that the current governance model is too prescriptive, too rigid, doesn't allow for a nimble and flexible and modern application, so we wanted to ensure that we gave the board that degree of flexibility and nimbleness.

I understand the member. The terminology in the bill says that there may be committees, but I can assure everyone there will be committees. We need that strong industry network from across the province to help inform competencies, outcomes, and to facilitate our trades system. We're not quite there yet, of course, and we

intend to develop that through regulation and will use the next few months, as I've already mentioned, to engage extensively with some of the current committees and other stakeholders about what that governance framework, what that committee structure should look like. There's an opportunity to develop something new and fresh, perhaps, and a little bit more modern.

You know, I'm not quite sure where they'll land. We'll give the board a high degree of deference. But I was actually just talking about this with officials from my department the other day and made it clear to them that it's a clear expectation of mine that the board must take an approach in determining this committee's structure that engages extensively. I won't accept a proposed committee or governance structure that has just been developed by the board in isolation, without any kind of discussion or engagement. That won't be acceptable.

But I think there's great opportunity. I think one of the areas that I personally am looking at – of course, we need to have wide engagement and consultation. I have a lot of interest in what New Zealand has been doing recently in their vocational system. They've created regional workforce councils, which I think is quite interesting. They look at the regional workforce needs. Do we need more plumbers in northern Alberta, welders, carpenters? What are the regional workforce needs? Then, obviously, they work to make sure those regional needs are met, which I think is a novel idea.

They also have sector skills councils, which also strikes me as quite interesting, rather than our current model, which looks at every specific trade. They're actually just making these changes as well very recently, I think, a year ago. They're looking at – I just use this as an example. These skills councils are structured around particular areas of the economy, let's say construction, and they bring employers, employees, and other partners and other individuals that have an interest in the construction sector more broadly to discuss the skills needs of that industry and of that sector. They think about: well, how should the competencies change? How is technology changing the field? Where do we need to go? They're thinking about it on a much higher level, of course, as an entire sector, which I find quite interesting.

I just give those as examples because I think that we have an opportunity with this bill to look at those other models, to see what works best here. I think there's a lot of strength in the current system that we have, with our local committees and provincial committees, but I think there's also an opportunity to do some significant research and discussion about other models that could work effectively as well. We will be developing that. I can provide reassurance. It will absolutely be industry driven. That's an essential component of success of a vocational system anywhere.

I'm happy to answer any more questions that the member may have.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I appreciate the minister speaking to the value of industry-driven advice and his consideration of that. What I've heard from stakeholders is that the current industry-driven PACs, LACs, and even the board itself may have been underused by the minister. A lot of appointments expired, and those positions were not filled. Perhaps that was in anticipation of Bill 67, but certainly it's left an impression that the minister hasn't been consulting with those existing frameworks that are set up.

I will also say that I understand the minister plans to consult widely, but in his response on the question on PACs and LACs he just very clearly said: we might re-create it, but we might do something entirely new, and we're not sure. I would just like to flag the level of uncertainty that leaves people within the current system

as well as how hard it is, again, for the Official Opposition to support a piece of legislation that we have no idea where it's going to go and how it will be implemented. I cannot stress that enough because, again, we are talking about a bill that is enabling legislation: everything is deferred to regulation, the minister will have new powers, things that the board used to do now the minister or the administration will be doing, and significant key pieces like the LACs and PACs have been put in as a "may." The board that the minister appoints is going to be so critical, and the minister will have a lot of influence over who is on that board, what perspectives they represent as they enter that, so it really becomes an incredibly important thing for the minister to be able to try and get this right.

This is where you can get into real trouble if you don't realize that perhaps you're in an echo chamber and that you're not talking to all the stakeholders. That can be a big challenge, again, one of the reasons why the Official Opposition put forward our amendment and through the debate is raising all of these concerns.

Again I thank the minister for going back and forth and sharing this. I remain very concerned around Bill 67 and its potential impacts, especially given that there are obviously big foundational areas that the minister doesn't know yet where we're going to land. From one perspective that is right and good because he needs to consult, but from another perspective that's really problematic because we don't know where we're going to land and we don't know what vision the minister may have for these systems. I do want to just once again emphasize that the current industry network system and its ability to help make informed decisions regarding the trades with advice from those directly involved in the trades are incredibly important, so I hope that the minister will emphasize that. I'm glad to hear of the direction he's given his department, but it's certainly a top concern for the stakeholders that I'm working with.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. Happy, Madam Chair, just to reinforce that, how important an industry-driven process is and the important role that industry has. As I mentioned a moment ago, that's a critical pillar of the success of our trades and vocational system here in Alberta and around the world. In fact, you look at leading jurisdictions that have incredibly successful vocational educational and training programs: they're industry driven. You know, that foundational principle isn't going anywhere.

In terms of, you know, not appointing board members or vacancies, this was just as it relates to the current AIT Board, and we did have some vacancies. Of course, as per the bill we elected not to appoint new people to a board that would no longer be in place for obvious reasons.

Again, in terms of new powers, you know, I just want to come back to this. There's a balance here. I mean, there are some areas where we're changing. As I mentioned, appointing members to the board – and that's to the AIT Board. Currently cabinet does this, and we're changing that so that the minister can do it, so there is a little bit of a change there. As well, when it comes to trade designation authority, that's also through cabinet, and we're moving that to the minister. Again, we're doing that to help create a more efficient system and to allow things to move more quickly. There are also other powers that currently rest with cabinet, that we'll be making clear rest with the board because we want to make sure that the board can make certain decisions and that that doesn't have to go through cabinet. So, yes, while some functions are going from cabinet to the minister, other functions are going from cabinet to the board. It's all being looked at through the lens of making a really efficient and nimble system.

4:30

Again I'll just come back to the committee element really quickly. You know, I understand the member's concerns. My intent is to work with our stakeholders and other professionals to build this new, modern framework together. I believe that we have to give ourselves the ability, first of all, to do that and then, secondly, make sure we have broad engagement, consultation, which we will. As I mentioned earlier, over the next few months we'll be devoting a lot of effort to engagement and consultation on the regulations that will supplement this bill.

I really think that we have a unique window to look at – you know, maybe the current committee structure is the right one. Maybe we collectively decide: "You know what? We don't need to make any changes to that." Okay. Well, so be it. I don't have all the answers, and I don't have a particular framework in mind that I'm going to say: this has to be the framework.

We need to consult with industry, employers, employees, other groups, apprentices and build a structure that meets everybody's needs. If I recall correctly, under the current model I think apprentices aren't even allowed to be on those local committees, which I think we could all agree is a little bit of a head-scratcher.

So let's capitalize on the window, let's capitalize on the opportunity, let's take a look at what's happening in other jurisdictions, and let's see how we can build a strong framework that is going to benefit all Albertans, that is going to benefit our apprentices, employers, all partners in our trades and apprenticeship system and subsequently benefit our economy. I think that there is a window that we can really capitalize on here together.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: I thought we'd just, you know, break up the voice a little here in the House.

I just want to start by thanking the minister for very fruitful answers and serious consideration of the questions this afternoon. It's always such a pleasure to feel like we're having a discussion that, you know, will help everybody understand a little better.

You know, I hardly would consider myself anyone who understands this area with any great depth, so my questions may even seem slightly naive – I accept that – but I do have some understanding of the nature of academia. I taught at the University of Calgary and MacEwan University for many, many years, so my questions come from a peripheral understanding of this and perhaps don't completely apply.

I do understand that we are in a time of significant change in society with regard to the types of pieces of work that will be required for a variety of industries. I mean, what we're doing right now with renewables in this province is incredible, and most of the tasks that are engaged in the renewable energy area probably weren't even imagined 30 years ago. I know that many people are trying to figure out: how do you shift from the type of work that you were doing in the previous occupation to the new occupation? I see that there's some attempt in this legislation to recognize that people certainly have strong skill sets and that we need to understand that those skill sets exist and respect that they exist and to acknowledge them as people make transitions from one nature of work to another nature of work. I guess I welcome an examination of how that might happen.

I understand, as the minister has said and, of course, our critic has said, that this is an enabling legislation, that much of what we're concerned about will play out as things happen. I'd certainly be interested – I mean, just as the minister has a moment at some point to speak about some of the particular new trades that they imagine,

the minister or the government in general, may need to be established and designated over the next little while that presently don't have that status, it would just be of interest to me, as much as anything else, to understand some of that.

Of course, you know, part of that: I'd be interested to know a little bit about which trades are likely to be disestablished. Are we seeing, because of the transitions out there in the community, that some trades, as they're presently configured, are, you know, likely not to continue? We certainly don't need the same kind of skill sets that we needed a hundred years ago in this province in exactly the same configuration, and I suspect that that's an ongoing reality of every government everywhere and every province. Just any kind of insight the minister has on the particular ones that are going through transition.

One particular piece that I have some concern about – and it may be just from my outsider stance in all of this – is that as people expand the number of types of trades that are out there, you tend to have different clusters of skill sets that come together that are not wholly unique, but it's the cluster itself that defines the trade. You know, the example would be now, of course, that if somebody is doing gas fitting and plumbing along the way, there are certainly skill sets in gas fitting that are equally the same in plumbing. I mean, they have some tasks that are the same. Yet you wouldn't simply just call a plumber to do what we now understand to be a gas fitting job. Having come from plumbing into gas fitting, you may be starting in a great place, but the cluster of things that you're expected to know and the depth with which you know them will vary.

I guess that leaves me with some concerns. I mean, I know that in some situations a skill set which is sort of peripheral to one trade is actually more central, and what happens then is that when it is taught in the peripheral circumstance, it's taught to a lesser depth, with less nuance, with less, you know, concern about all of the various applications as it is in those services where, for example, they would see that particular task or set as a central task.

In order to sort of bring it back to my world so that I can explain why I'm concerned about this, I'm going to give an example that has nothing to do with trades, but perhaps you'll understand. I've had the experience of being a social worker for many years in this province, and I also have had the opportunity to do my PhD work in the faculty of human ecology. One of the things that I became aware of is that both social work and human ecology start their programs with interviewing skills courses because they're quite central to the type of work that's being done.

However, when I had an opportunity to be a guest lecturer in the human ecology classes, you know, I asked a lot of questions of the students about what they expected to do with their interviewing. What was the ultimate end goal here? The end goal was very different than that same question being asked of social work students. Social work students would often say things like: I want to be able to use my interviewing skills to help people deal therapeutically with past traumas such as child sexual abuse or something of that nature. But when I asked the students in the interviewing class in human ecology, "What is your interest in interviewing skills?" it had nothing to do with deep therapeutic work and the type of interviewing skills that were necessary for that but, rather, the type of interviewing skills that were necessary for good communication on working teams and helping people to be part of a system that is moving a project forward or something of that nature.

Now, the concern was that the universities were starting to say: look, if you've got an interviewing class in faculty A and you've got an interviewing class in faculty B, we should be able to say that it doesn't matter where you took your interviewing class; you have

an interviewing class, so that should be accredited the same way, and then you just move on. That, to some degree, made us very concerned in a faculty like social work, where we understood that certainly there were various interviewing classes, but the type of interviewing, the nature of the interviewing, the skill set that was expected from people coming out of the interviewing class and the social work class was very different and for a very different purpose than it was in human ecology. I'm laying all that out just so you understand the nature of the question.

4:40

Now, I'm imagining that that's also true when it comes time to look at trades. For some people, you know, welding pipe or whatever particular task is the core of the work they do and the demands of the outcome of their ability to produce is very different than somebody who's only likely to have to do something like that once every couple of years. It's a peripheral task, and you just have to know enough to get through the situation at hand. You're not trying to achieve the same level or standard or nature of outcome as someone else in a different welding situation.

Having laid all that out in a very long way – I'm sorry; I apologize – I guess I am then just wondering about a couple of things. I'll just throw out my questions and then leave it at that. How is it and who is it that it will be decided that there will be equivalencies so that people's experience can be recognized without accepting people's previous history, when it is not really comparable in terms of depth and breadth of knowledge? How will that get determined? Will the trades be able to step in and say, "Hey, you know, I know you learned how to do this kind of welding in this particular trade, but really it does not meet the standard required in this other kind of trade"? Will the trades be the people alongside industry? Of course, I absolutely fundamentally believe it's got to be a full partnership. Will they be there to be able to say that you can't just sort of recognize one person's experience as equivalent to another just because there are some aspects that are the same? I guess I'm just wondering a little bit about that process and how we'll be assured of that.

I guess I'm also just wondering about sort of the role of the minister's office in doing this piece. I'm a little bit concerned about – and I think it's already been reflected by our critic and the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods – the consolidation of power in the department as opposed to in the training institutions, and I just worry about the balance there. Who gets to decide that something is acceptable or something is not? It seems to me the farther you are away from the actual practice, the less skill set you have in actually deciding equivalency. I just wonder about that.

I guess my final question would be around – and I've certainly gone a little longer than I was supposed to – if we are recognizing different training situations from different areas and then trying to put them all together, how will the credentialing of that work? Again, I can only go back to my academic piece. I may be totally out to lunch here because of the nature of red seal testing and so on, but, you know, I would be concerned, then, that if you had a person, for example, wanting to take a bachelor of arts degree and they went to 20 different universities and took three courses from each one, they would certainly have the credits to get a degree, but I would ask: well, whose degree do they have? I'm just wondering: is that a comparable question in this area, and if so, what's the minister's resolution of it?

Thank you for the time.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to the member opposite for his insightful questions. I have to

admit that I came at it from a very similar perspective. As the member may know, I completed my PhD, spent a little bit of time as a lecturer. I wasn't that familiar with, you know, our trades and apprenticeship system, so it's been an interesting experience over the past couple of years, really, getting to understand a lot of the nuances and the complexities.

I'll try to answer most of the member's questions. Apologies if I miss any. You know, he mentioned at the beginning – the member was asking about which trades could be designated as new trades, which ones may be dedesignated. Apologies for this, but it's a genuine answer. I think that the genuine answer is: I don't know because it's not a decision I make in isolation. You know, that process is an extensive process whereby employers and industry are consulted.

Like, if we say – I don't know; let's pick an example – a sushi chef needs to be a designated trade, we would conduct extensive employer surveys of restaurants and say, "Like, is this actually a thing? Do you need sushi chefs to be a designated trade, and why?" and get their feedback and go through that process. An application would be made to the board, and the board would make a recommendation to me as the minister and say: "Hey, we've done all this work. We've talked to all these restaurants, and we think that a sushi chef should become a designated trade." Then I would subsequently take that to cabinet.

The same goes for dedesignation, so it's industry driven in that regard. You know, if industry believes that a trade should be dedesignated or a new one should be established, we will – there has to be demonstrated engagement with affected employers, and then we're looking for a significant degree of consensus before moving forward.

In the same vein, you know, the member did talk at a later point about consolidation of power in the minister's office and who gets to decide the standards and some of these designations, but we're actually shifting that to the board, to the people, to the experts that are on the board that have that high degree of expertise and knowledge that are closely connected because, as the member mentioned, my level of expertise or that of other colleagues about designating a sushi chef as a designated trade – we may not have that level of expertise. But, of course, individuals on the board that would have feedback from a representative committee structure would have that level of expertise. We're going to shift that responsibility about designating or deciding standards as well to the board, to individuals that are really close to the occupation, the profession, which I think is incredibly important and will help to provide for a much more efficient and nimble system.

Furthermore, on the question – because the member did talk about establishing standards and who gets to decide what the standards are for a particular trade. There's a complicated way that that works right now. Industry and the AIT Board are involved and they make recommendations, but it fundamentally falls to me as the minister or the minister of the day to make a final decision on the establishment of those standards. We're going to move that to the board entirely because, I mean, if professionals and employers and others agree that the standards for carpentry or for hairstyling need to change from here to here, I'm going to take their advice. I don't know why the minister needs to kind of give that sign-off. If industry has made that determination, then let the board make that determination and move forward. That's one of the changes that we'll be seeing as a result of Bill 67. Bill 67 as well further strengthens industry's role and ability in being able to establish competencies for trades professionals, which I think is particularly important.

Just coming back to an earlier comment as well, the member asked about new trades that could be designated, and that's why – I apologize – I said that I'm not sure, because it depends on what

kind of applications come forward and what employers and industry think at the time.

That being said, there is a distinction we're trying to make within this bill between trades and apprenticeship education. I do believe that there are many potential areas where we can take the apprenticeship model of training and education and apply it to different occupations. I think very specifically about areas like banking, for example, or coding or other occupations in IT or marketing or business or even retail. These are all occupations that I strongly believe could be taught and trained through an apprenticeship style. It won't necessarily lead to a trade per se, but I believe that these are areas that could be delivered through an apprenticeship style, and there's more to say on this. We'll have more to say on this, actually, very shortly in terms of apprenticeship expansion. We'll be looking for ideas from postsecondary institutions, employers, unions, other organizations to give us ideas about what occupations could be trained and educated through an apprenticeship-style system.

4:50

Lastly, I know that the member talked a little bit about, you know, assessing equivalency and standards and how that works. Within our trades network, of course, the industry determines the outcomes, determines the competencies, and then we within Advanced Education administer the examinations in partnership with postsecondary institutions to ensure that those outcomes, those competencies, I should say, that are being desired are actually met before we issue credentials. Of course, if someone has some training in another area and through their time believes that they can take some of those skills and apply them to another trade, they can do that by challenging the examinations. Again, they must demonstrate proficiency in the competencies that that industry has set out, and I think that that model works quite well.

Again, just in closing, I wanted to take the opportunity to reiterate that this is the beginning of a significant process and of a significant step forward that will involve much more engagement and consultation as we build out the regulations, as we build out the new governance framework, as we think about potential opportunities for new apprenticeships. It'll be an exciting time, and there are many elements here, including the apprenticeship expansion and the academic recognition, that I know my team within Advanced Ed is particularly excited about because, from what I understand from there, nobody else in Canada is looking at this through this lens at the moment. I think we have an opportunity to really create and establish some strong leadership about the future of trades and the future of apprenticeship education. I was talking to my counterpart in Ontario the other day, who was really interested in some of the work that we're doing.

I think there's a great window of opportunity, and I'm very confident that employees, employers, postsecondary institutions, unions, and others will continue the great level of engagement that we've had thus far in building this new framework and encourage others listening to continue to stay involved throughout this effort.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 67 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:53 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For:

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

5:10

Against:

Ceci	Ganley	Hoffman
Dach	Gray	Loyola
Feehan		

Totals: For – 36 Against – 7

[The remaining clauses of Bill 67 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 67.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, does the assembly concur in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 51 Citizen Initiative Act

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to third reading of Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act. This bill is about strengthening democracy in our province and making sure Albertans have an even more powerful voice when it

comes to matters that impact their lives. Albertans have told us again and again that they want a greater say in the business of their government and between elections. In fact, in the fall of 2020 the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee held public meetings and accepted written submissions about this legislation. To be blunt, the all-party committee found that Albertans were very supportive of citizen initiative legislation.

Under Bill 51, Mr. Speaker, any Albertan who is an eligible voter could bring forward an initiative for government to consider. These could be ideas for new laws or policies or even proposals for constitutional referendum questions, or they could be used to correct a government that failed to uphold what they campaigned on; for example, the NDP's immensely unpopular Bill 6 and the carbon tax. If Albertans had had that democratic tool at their disposal at the time, voters could have expressed their democratic will and held the NDP to account.

To bring an initiative forward, Mr. Speaker, an Albertan would apply to the Chief Electoral Officer to start a petition for their idea for an initiative. After submitting their application, the Chief Electoral Officer would provide them with the petition they would need to use to gather signatures of eligible voters. For their petition to be successful, they would need 10 per cent of voters province-wide for legislative or policy initiatives. For constitutional initiatives petitioners would need the signatures of 20 per cent of voters province-wide, and petitioners would need that level of support in two-thirds of Alberta's constituencies. In practical terms that means 58 constituencies. To be clear, that is 20 per cent support in each of those 58 constituencies. They would also have 90 days to gather their signatures.

Once complete, the Chief Electoral Officer would review the signatures and determine if the petition is successful. If it is, legislative and policy initiatives would be referred to a committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for consideration. If the committee does not support a legislative initiative, a public vote will be held. Successful constitutional initiatives will proceed through the process established in the Referendum Act. This includes a resolution being made in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and the Lieutenant Governor in Council issuing an order for a referendum to be held. Let me correct myself: the Lieutenant Governor, not that of in council.

The Citizen Initiative Act would give Albertans a chance to put forward their ideas for governments to consider, giving them a real and meaningful way to be directly involved in the process. Mr. Speaker, we know that Albertans want more opportunities to express their democratic will outside of elections. The response to the just announced equalization referendum shows that Albertans welcome these opportunities. It also reveals the diversity of opinion amongst Albertans, a genuine taste to persuade their fellow citizens on what is best for our province.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that enables its citizens to determine their own destiny. Albertans must have a greater say in their democratic system. They must be able to hold their elected officials accountable and participate in the democratic process between elections. The Citizen Initiative Act puts Albertans in the driver's seat of their democracy. I urge all members of this Assembly to support this very important legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 51.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the Solicitor General and Minister of Justice has moved third reading of Bill 51. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora would like to add her comments.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I rise here today to speak to Bill 51, titled the Citizen Initiative Act. I have

to say that yet again the current government is creating a situation where they appear to be stacking things in the interests of themselves, first of all, and, secondly, of those with deep pockets, who already have significant influence. While I would like us to see the Justice minister bring forward legislation that increases opportunities for everyone to engage fairly and equally in democracy, certainly the barriers that the current government is choosing to put in place for citizens to have the same level of access are far greater than what the Premier is choosing, obviously, for himself. He comes to this place with a question that he wants, and that is very quickly supported by his formerly united Sometimes on Certain Issues United Conservative caucus.

5:20

They forge ahead full speed and actually even give themselves the ability to campaign on something that they're bringing out for a referendum even with the resources of their offices, including their MSAs as well as their individual MLA offices as well as their other resources that they have available to them as a government.

Then when it comes to this bill, obviously, one of the first things that you can do is look at other comparators from other jurisdictions about the influence of big money. One of the jurisdictions, not too far from us but not within Canada, that has a great deal of referendums, of course, is California. Anyone who listens to the late-night talk show circuit hears people regularly talking about the different referendums that are on the ballot in California almost constantly.

When you look at how much money has been spent to push certain initiatives – for example, in California just between 2000 and 2012 there was a nice, rolled-up number for that time frame, which is why we're using that. The total spending on initiatives in that state exceeded two billion, with a "b," dollars, with three initiatives seeing more than \$130 million spent on each of those individual initiatives.

Two billion dollars is even more money than this government chose to gamble on the re-election of Donald Trump. Today we're of course seeing the impacts of that bet and how much money this government was willing to take from the public, money that could have been used to invest in things like improving health care, education, job creation. Please. Job creation would have been a great place to take that investment and focus it.

When we look at the minuscule amount that this government is willing to invest in hydrogen and compare that to how much the government gambled on the re-election of Donald Trump and now, in this bill, how much opportunity the government is creating for public investment as well as private influence through dollars to drive certain outcomes, you know, again, I shouldn't be shocked, but it is incredibly disappointing to see that this government continues to try to create two different systems, one for themselves, as those who have access to large amounts of public resources to be able to push a specific agenda and a specific question, and then another set for everybody else.

Of course, those who have deep pockets get access to drive their narrative and drive their questions. When we look at other jurisdictions like California, we've seen that those campaigns that were the highest financed were the most successful. Campaigns that had a lot of money to push a specific referendum question were often voted for and had the outcome of whoever had the deepest pockets voting for them in the end.

This place should be a shrine to democracy and a place where we uphold it and we work to strengthen it. Instead, the Premier early on in his time, about a year into his term, brought forward legislation, well, even less than a year because it was prior to the pandemic, to fire the Election Commissioner in the middle of an

investigation into the Premier's own leadership campaign. Now we see a bill that continues to push more big money into politics rather than finding ways to amplify the voices of the people.

The Premier is going to say, "Well, the people can vote," but we have very clear, documented evidence from other jurisdictions that have this type of big-money politics in terms of third-party campaigns and referendum questions clearly showing that it skews the outcomes of these types of votes towards those who have the most money that they are spending on these types of decisions. Guided democracy, some might say.

This definitely is an issue of significant frustration, I think, for our caucus, and I think some of the benchmarks that are being put in place are going to be very challenging for ordinary people to have their voices heard. I think that if the government was truly interested in hearing, frankly, what the people of Alberta wanted, they would take some of their most contentious policy positions that people have already been very vocal about and halt them.

We have seen at least a delay on some, certainly a retraction over some of the very aggressive direction that was being taken toward parks and the sale of parks, some pause around the removal of the Lougheed coal policy, and certainly, you know, slowing down is better than forging ahead full speed ahead, but it's not actually hearing the feedback that clearly has been given from the people of the province.

Another area that very clearly this province has expressed significant outrage on is pensions, pensions that this government had no mandate to put their hands on, pensions that are people's deferred earnings, that they are using to plan for their career transition or their retirement. But the government certainly isn't proposing that they be able to have a referendum question on this government's meddling with people's personal savings for their future and for their retirement.

Another one, of course, is curriculum, and we've seen so many parents, primarily, speak up and be organizing and enraged about how this government has moved Alberta so far backwards in terms of their engagement with what should be knowledge that students acquire when they're in kindergarten through grade 6. But this government tries to keep forging ahead, spending public money doing advertisements to try and push people towards one specific perspective when it comes to curriculum and refusing to acknowledge that.

You know, of the kids who are in school right now – public, Catholic, and francophone – at least 95 per cent of those students will not see this curriculum because their boards have fully rejected, outright rejected, what this government has proposed. Of those, about 5 per cent of students who go to public, Catholic, or francophone schools: one board has said that they will pilot three subject areas; one, I believe, said two subject areas; and then three said, "We'll let our teachers engage in this and decide." Clearly, there has been an overwhelming rejection by school boards when it comes to the curriculum.

Another area, of course, where some of the first people to speak out were indigenous leaders, including elders and Confederacy of Treaty Six and the Métis Nation, very quickly speaking out, and the government tried to take counterquotes, but the people who those quotes were attributed to felt very used in the process and have since come out saying that they don't support the curriculum either and that they weren't given full transparency about what was in it when they were asked to add their names as endorsers of the curriculum.

We have the francophone community, which very clearly has said that the curriculum that's being pushed and aggressively pushed on Albertans through this process, through this minister, and through the current Premier doesn't reflect francophone knowledge, francophone culture and is, at best, a translation of what

was written in English, not pedagogically sound and not honouring francophone people and francophone education, which is, of course, protected through many court challenges and foundational documents that we have here for our country and for the education of young people in our country.

We have folks from Japanese Alberta communities who have said that this doesn't reflect their experiences and that this isn't an inclusive curriculum that welcomes children of Japanese heritage in the classroom to see themselves reflected back in that curriculum.

Of course, parents and teachers have also been very loud. Over 90 per cent of teachers have already rejected it; over 95 per cent of principals through academically sound, peer-reviewed type research that was done around this. And then, of course, recently we had teachers, which includes principals, at the representative assembly vote overwhelmingly nonconfidence in the current minister. Of course, one of the main arguments people talked about – there were sort of three key areas: obviously, cuts and negative impacts for vulnerable students and those who are equity seeking in particular, the lack of responsiveness and appropriateness in terms of responding to COVID in schools. What a disaster this government has been when it comes to protecting and providing for a safe return and stability for students, staff, and families. A complete disaster. All kids sent home at least three times. That's a huge failure, objectively.

The third one and probably the one that I hear the most often right now through the work I do as a critic for Education is around the curriculum. Of course, the curriculum is supposed to be these sacred outcomes that we aspire to ensure all children have an opportunity to experience – children in K to 6 is why I'm using that language but students in general. There are many experts here in the province who've dedicated their careers and their lives to this work. Understanding scope and sequence, understanding learner outcomes, understanding what age appropriateness is, understanding how you build knowledge and how you build knowledge that is inclusive and acceptable for all: completely I don't even want to say back of mind because it doesn't at all seem to be an objective to do anything that's scientifically valid when it comes to this curriculum. It is incredibly infuriating.

5:30

Parents have been saying for a long time – we had a petition tabled in this House, gathered hand-signed signatures, approximately 12,000. I think it was 11,800 and something signatures that were gathered in 11 days in this province in the middle of a pandemic, tabled in this place, saying: put a hold to what you're doing here. Instead, this government has decided that they want to move forward at breakneck speeds on their own question, making it difficult and creating so many incentives for financial implications, the financial steering of democracy through the rules that they've put in place through this bill.

Those are some of the reasons that I wanted to highlight for why I am opposed to this bill in its current form. Certainly, I wish that wasn't the case. I wish that this government was actually doing something to take big money out of politics instead of finding more ways to shove it in. This government continues to be so focused on large, influential, financially motivated segments of society rather than focusing on regular Albertans, who they certainly pander to when it comes to elections but don't govern for when it comes to making decisions. I think that is wrong headed, and I think it will not serve this government, which is proving itself to be quite arrogant and entitled. I don't think it will serve them well as they continue to move forward.

I think that justifying creating imbalance in such a significant degree with regard to this bill is one example of how that influences

their decisions on policy. But, of course, the easiest examples are the ones that we see in how the Premier and his liquor cabinet behave in this place and in other places as well and how they continue to highlight that they believe that there's one set of rules for themselves and another set of rules for everybody else. That is, of course, what I think this legislation speaks to as well: one set of rules for those of us who can't afford to spend \$130 million trying to buy votes for a specific outcome on a referendum and a separate set of rules for everybody else.

Those are a couple of my key concerns. I know that some of my colleagues also would like to raise some, and for that, I await their feedback and their comments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 51, and I see that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo would like to provide some additional comments.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll address this, hopefully, in a rather succinct way. I, too, will not be supporting this bill. The minister stood up and said that there were a couple of examples with the previous government, that I was a part of, that if this bill would have been in place, the bill before us could have been useful in identifying the views of Albertans to strengthen democracy.

I just want to say that my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has just gone over several unpopular decisions that this government, the UCP government, has made in its short time here, and I'll just quickly review a few of those. Laying off 11,000 health care heroes is one thing that I know is incredibly unpopular. Gutting the Alberta postsecondary school funding is another incredibly unpopular decision of this government. Universally seeing their elementary school curriculum rejected by Albertans and school boards around the province, laying off 20,000-plus teachers and support staff, the privatization of parks, rescinding the coal policy, the pensions issue: all of those, Mr. Speaker, in anyone's estimation, truly, truly show that this government is off base with the views of Albertans. If anything would strengthen democracy, to see all of those issues kicked out by a citizen's initiative would be a good thing.

I don't think that this act is really what was talked about, particularly in some big areas where the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee made several recommendations that weren't upheld by the minister in this bill. Of course, we see that an initiative to identify the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as something that needs to be changed was something that the committee wanted to forbid, but that is possible with this bill. We also talked about enacting reasonable campaign limits on contributions or expenses. We don't know what those will be because that will be relegated to regulations when they are published. I don't think anything good is going to come out of that.

There were several motions put forward by the NDP members at the committee level, two that I just talked about, and there was one other major one talking about the need for requiring education materials with petitions so that Albertans would have a better understanding of what the consequences of their vote to specific petitions would be or the signing up or giving their signature to petitions, what that would be. That was not upheld as well.

The requiring of votes to be held in conjunction with general elections. Now, the AUMA and RMA have both said that they want local elections to stay local. This is another example of where local elections can be taken over by items that municipalities and counties and others don't see within their purview or desire to have during the same time as their local elections. But that was not listened to, and it made its way into

this Citizen Initiative Act, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of amendments that we put forward, both here in the House and during committee, that failed to gain any traction that would have made this bad bill better.

Just to turn to a few other comments I want to make, the government ignored recommendations that the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee brought forward. We see that the B.C. legislation requires that a proposed bill be included with a petition, yet this legislation requires only a proposed idea for legislation for a petition to move forward. Not sure why the government supports this level of ambiguity or potential margin for error, but it does, and it's baked into this bill. We had expert testimony, if you will, from the National Conference of State Legislatures, and they gave us that view that education was a requirement and should make for better policy, but that motion wasn't supported at the committee.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleague before me has said and we have kind of exhibited through our work, I'm going to oppose this bill, and I hope other members of this Legislature will as well.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there others wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call upon the minister to close debate. The hon. the minister to close debate.

Mr. Madu: Debate closed, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:40 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Schulz
Amery	Madu	Sigurdson, R.J.
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Nally	Singh
Dreeshen	Neudorf	Smith
Ellis	Nicolaides	Stephan
Fir	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Horner	Orr	Turton
Issik	Panda	van Dijken
Jones	Rowswell	Walker
Kenney	Rutherford	Williams
Long	Savage	Yaseen

Against the motion:

Ceci	Ganley	Hoffman
Dach	Gray	Loyola
Feehan		

Totals: For – 36 Against – 7

[Motion carried; Bill 51 read a third time]

The Speaker: Members, pursuant to Standing Order 3(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca