



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, June 15, 2021

Day 115

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UC),
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Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
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Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
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Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
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Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
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Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 15, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, a warm welcome to the guest of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo: Jessi Graham. Jessi is a graduate student who works in the member's office.

Also joining us today is Jacques Beaudin, who is a guest of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Premier's Leadership

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. How many versions of this Premier are hiding out in the sky palace? Truth be told, Albertans are having a hard time keeping up with all his contradictions. He tells them he's a, quote, fiscal hawk, but he blew \$1.3 billion on the reckless gamble on Keystone XL. He tells them that equalization is a bad deal for our province, but he voted for it when he was a minister in Ottawa. He tells them that his wine-soaked sky palace dinner with his liquor cabinet didn't break any public health rules, but then he apologizes for holding it.

Mr. Speaker, I'd love to tell you that the contradictions end there, but that's not even close. During the election campaign he signed a public health care guarantee, but he spent the entire term so far increasing privatization in our health care system while attacking doctors, nurses, and health care workers. His very first bill this session targeted the right to protest in Alberta, but he won't condemn far-right protestors even when they gather against public health care restrictions and march with racist iconography. He told Albertans that the Legislature should stay open no matter what, but then he shut it down to avoid questions even as he told schools to stay open. On the subject of schools, he says that he's for public education, but the truth is that he's so hostile to it that he made school boards remove the word "public" from their names.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier's contradictions are catching up to him every single day. Albertans are tired of his political game playing. They want a Premier who has the courage to stand up and do what's right, a Premier who puts our province above their own political interest. They want a Premier who doesn't just say whatever he finds politically convenient on the day. This Premier might not know what he's for and what he's against, but Albertans have worked him out. There's only one thing he's for, himself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

Elder Abuse

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year on June 15 our province recognizes World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Seniors helped build this province and are the strength of Alberta. Unfortunately, they are not always treated with the respect that they deserve. Elder abuse is a serious issue in Alberta. Prior to 2020 we estimated that nearly 1 in 10 Alberta seniors were subjected to some

form of abuse. Since then, we have heard that community organizations are reporting an increase in the incidence, complexity, and severity of elder abuse cases in Alberta. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is an important occasion for us to stand together and raise our voices against elder abuse.

It is also important for us to find ways to take action. Earlier today the Minister of Seniors and Housing announced several new ways this government is working with Alberta communities to prevent and address elder abuse. This includes providing \$650,000 to 16 organizations in partnership with the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council. Alberta's government will also be undertaking an engagement to update how we respond to elder abuse. It will open up a dialogue with stakeholders and Albertans to better understand, recognize, and prevent it at the community level.

Mr. Speaker, we know that elder abuse is a complex issue. We know it will take the work of many of us all across the province to solve it. This is why we are working closely with community partners to examine it at a local level. I believe that if we stand united, we can keep all seniors safe and free from abuse. On World Elder Abuse Awareness Day I ask all Albertans to wear purple and stand with me against elder abuse.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

High School Graduation 2021

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the Assembly this afternoon and congratulate the graduating class of 2021. After these long 16 months of COVID I'm truly inspired by instructors and students alike, that have persevered through a variety of interruptions and challenges to complete their courses of study. This year's graduates have had their last two years of academics impacted by COVID, and I sincerely hope that each graduate takes an extra bow as they receive their diploma in celebration of their perseverance and resilience.

I'm the proud mom of two graduates this year. Our eldest son, Nicholas, achieved his bachelor of commerce degree from MacEwan University at the end of April, and our daughter Isabelle will celebrate her high school graduation with her classmates from Charles Spencer high school in the great constituency of Grande Prairie on June 25 as she delivers the valedictorian's address along with her co-honouree, Nolan Roberts. Congratulations to them both on this tremendous achievement and to Rhys Neudorf, the son of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, on his achievement as valedictorian for his class.

The 2021 graduates are particularly inspiring when I think of the hours of time in online class, the multiple sessions of quarantine and self-isolation, the stress on parents, the transitions back and forth, and the repeated adjustments in response to COVID restrictions throughout the pandemic.

High school commencement ceremonies have been held over successive weekends in Grande Prairie and multiple schools, including Peace Wapiti academy, Grande Prairie composite high, Charles Spencer, l'école Nouvelle Frontière, John Paul II, and St. Joseph Catholic school as well as, of course, Grande Prairie Regional College.

I would like to again take this opportunity to thank educators for their investment in our children and their excellent instruction right across the province. I know our children have been challenged and supported to grow in their logic and reasoning skills as well as their extracurricular pursuits, including athletics and music.

I would like to once again commend all graduates across Alberta on their achievement despite the challenges each one has faced throughout the pandemic. Here's to the class of 2021.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

University of Alberta Funding

Mr. Eggen: For 113 years the University of Alberta has helped shape some of our province's brightest minds. It has been the site of Nobel prize winning research. It has served as a launchpad for some of our most innovative and progressive thinkers and has acted as a catalyst on numerous fronts for economic diversification.

Now it is contending with its greatest challenge to date in the form of this Premier and the devastating cuts being levelled against it by this UCP government. The government has cut 25 per cent of the U of A's funding in just two years' time, and it appears that more cuts are on the way. To date 800 staff positions have been cut. Those who survived the pink slips were told that they may have to pay back some of their wages, that they have earned. Students aren't much better off. Tuition has skyrocketed. Classes have been cancelled. Whole programs face elimination. Yet what it all comes down to is that this government claims to have a vision for postsecondary. What a joke.

Let's be clear that with proper support, funding, and forward thinking, schools like the U of A can help to steer Alberta's economic future. Our Leader of the Official Opposition has talked about creating tens of thousands of new jobs by diversifying our economy and creating new, world-leading opportunities in areas like renewable energy development, technology, and agriculture. I know many of the hard-working folks in the U of A, know very well that they want to be a part of this economic shift. They can help us to get there; they just need the tools.

My message today to the government is simple. Reverse the cuts. Support students and faculty at the University of Alberta and right across this province. The damage that you can potentially cause is generational. We can all do better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East is next.

Air Tour 2021

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to highlight an exciting event taking place this summer, the 2021 Alberta air tour. The air tour was founded by three local pilots who have a passion for aviation, a love for our small-town Alberta airports and their pilots. Last year this event took place in the central region of Alberta, but this year the central, north, and south will be participating, including Airdrie. The 2021 air tour is about recognizing how strong our aviation sector is and breaking down barriers to encourage new people to learn how to fly. This event will give our communities a chance to compete against their neighbouring airports and show off what they have to offer.

The pandemic created a huge amount of stress for the aviation industry, which is why these three founders decided to bring excitement back to this industry and to all Albertans. Airdrie will welcome these pilots and their planes on August 7, and I'm thrilled that the air tour is a go. Planes are cool, pilots are cool, and local pilots and small-engine planes are even cooler. The aviation industry is key in supporting our tourism, business, travel, hotel, and restaurant sectors, which is why they need our support now.

1:40

I would like to thank and highlight the three local pilots who got together to make this happen – Scott Holmes of Outdoor Air Racing, Dina Jammaz of Elevate Aviation, and our very own

Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland – and share their passion for aviation and support for small-town Alberta airports.

Airdrie, please join me at our local Airdrie airport on August 7 to check out these cool planes and cool pilots while seeing just what our little old airport in Airdrie has to offer.

The Speaker: I keep trying to tell people that Speakers are cool, but it's not catching on like pilots, it seems.

Rural Concerns

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, the UCP has abandoned rural Alberta so fast that everyone's head is still spinning. They may talk a big game about supporting rural Alberta communities and families, but when the time comes to actually walk the talk, the funding support and real action, the UCP is nowhere to be found.

This government started a war on health care that saw many rural communities at risk of losing their doctors. This government attempted to sell and close parks. This government attempted to strip-mine the eastern slopes with no concerns about the impact on land, water, and agriculture. This government put fees and fines on the lands that have been free for Albertans for decades. This government played partisan games when it came to federal support during the pandemic and ignored farmers and ranchers. This government offered words but no action to municipalities struggling with unpaid taxes and so much more that I couldn't possibly do it in two minutes.

Rural Albertans are speaking out. Strathcona county councillor Bill Tonita told our convention, quote: we are at a time where it doesn't seem to matter what the issue is; our government is not listening. Sturgeon county councillor Karen Shaw wished this Premier would start doing the right thing for Alberta rather than for his party. Wetaskiwin city councillor Gabrielle Blatz-Morgan would tell this Premier that it's time to start caring about the people that he serves. Powerful voices from proud rural Albertans, that this Premier would do himself well to listen to. Instead, though, to those most negative feedbacks this Premier and his cabinet put in their earplugs and ignore it.

Rural Albertans see this behaviour. They've had enough. They see that while the UCP will act concerned and interested in their views at election time, between elections they're on their own. So I have a caution to my friends on the UCP side. Rural Albertans see what you're doing. They see your silence on the devastating policies that impact them. They see your total lack of interest in consulting them. They expect better. They deserve better. And if you keep this entitlement up in the next two years, you won't be representing them any longer.

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

Oil and Gas Industries and Policies

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada has the third-largest proven oil reserves in the world, with about 170 billion barrels, of which about 166 billion barrels are found in Alberta's oil sands. Oil and natural gas contributed \$105 billion to Canada's GDP in 2020 while the provincial GDP contribution was \$79.9 billion. All these are through responsible and ethical development as it is done with the highest environmental and social standards in the entire world.

Alberta's government remains committed to defending our largest industry, that supports hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in annual revenues. Mr. Speaker, this commitment is carried by Bill 72. It reasserts our constitutional right to manage our natural resources and the authority over the interprovincial export of primary production of natural resources.

This is a simple matter of ensuring that every option is available to defend Alberta's interests. What this legislation demonstrates is that our government remains absolutely committed to protecting Alberta, its economy, resources, and Albertans. For the same reasons, the government will also continue to advocate for the importance of new and future resource development and interprovincial exports, with the goal of reaching international markets.

The authority provided by Bill 72 is not intended to be utilized as the first option as the government will continue to seek the path of diplomacy with other jurisdictions at every opportunity. Like every other jurisdiction, we must continue to assertively defend our vital economic interests, that would preserve our prosperity, and promote the constitutional rights of our province and Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has a statement to make.

Polish-Canadian Heritage Day Act

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In World War II the 1st Polish Armoured Division served alongside and under the First Canadian Army in Europe, fighting the tyranny of Nazi Germany step by step, side by side, one country under occupation and the other country defending the freedoms of Canadians and citizens across the world. Mr. Speaker, the link between Poland and Canada goes back generations to World War II and before that.

As this Assembly knows, I introduced an act, the Polish-Canadian Heritage Day Act, in this Assembly a few weeks ago. It went through committee without any opposition, with, thankfully, unanimous bipartisan consent. It is now in this Chamber ready to be read. In 2016 in September this Chamber granted unanimous consent, bipartisan, to a similar bill on which this one is modelled, the Ukrainian-Canadian Heritage Day Act. I would ask not on my behalf but for the sake of the Polish citizens in Canada, those of Polish descent in Canada that we come together just like those two forces did, putting differences aside for a common purpose, and vote with unanimous consent to pass this bill before the Legislature rises.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Provincial Reopening in Brooks-Medicine Hat

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight I'm having a virtual town hall with the constituents of Brooks-Medicine Hat. I know that they are going to ask a variety of questions and raise a lot of concerns, but if I know anything, it's that this will be the common theme: Albertans desperately want to return to normal. I hear from these constituents every single day, and I am excited to have the opportunity to hear from them directly tonight.

Alberta isn't just opening for summer, Mr. Speaker; we are opening for good. Not a new normal; the real normal, the kind of normal where families have Sunday dinners, kids have sleepovers, and Albertans of all faiths are able to worship together, the kind of normal where we hug our grandparents, marry who we love, and dance all night. That's the way we know Alberta to be, and this hope brings excitement and relief to all of us across Brooks-Medicine Hat and in Alberta. We are looking forward to a Canada Day fireworks show, small-town parades, and all the pancakes we can eat. The sights, sounds, and excitement of the Medicine Hat stampede will be back, and the Hunter Brothers are even set to perform. We can go out for lunch

with as many people as we want, shop locally without checking who is in store, and, my favourite, we can leave our masks at home. We can visit our loved ones across the province, and we can look forward to vacations.

We are going back to the way things are supposed to be, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta we love never left, but the Alberta we want is back. It's back because Albertans across this province have stepped up, shown up, and followed up. Albertans have worked hard these past 16 or more months to make this a reality, and we are not looking back now. COVID might hang around for a while, but we will not be living in fear and definitely not in a perpetual cycle of lockdowns. We will place our trust in the experts and scientists as well as the power of vaccines to protect lives and livelihoods. We are going to enjoy the best summer ever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise to give oral notice of several motions. First is Government Motion 89:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 70, COVID-19 Related Measures Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

As well, Government Motion 90, also in my name:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 70, COVID-19 Related Measures Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Government Motion 91, also in my name:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 56, Local Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Government Motion 92:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 58, Freedom to Care Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

And Government Motion 93:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 58, Freedom to Care Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

As well, Government Motion 94, which will read as follows:

Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:

- (a) on the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that Mr. Neudorf replace Mr. Barnes and Mr. Williams replace Mr. Rehn,
- (b) on the Standing Committee on Families and Communities that Mr. Loewen replace Mr. Neudorf, and
- (c) on the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship that Mr. Rehn replace Mr. Loewen.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Keystone XL Pipeline Provincial Equity

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One point three billion dollars: last week Albertans got the bill after the Premier gambled and lost their money betting on the U.S. election, and, boy, it's a big one. Let's be clear. While Albertans wanted to see KXL succeed, no one thought that risking billions on a project outside of our jurisdiction was a smart move. Albertans deserve to know how this decision was made and what went wrong. Will the Premier agree to an independent, justice-led public inquiry into his bungling of the Keystone . . .

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Keystone pipeline was a project that, when completed and put into operation, would have provided over \$30 billion in wealth creation for Albertans. We made a calculated decision, recognizing that there was risk in the decision. We were perfectly transparent with Albertans. The reward was so great for generations that the investment was rational and defensible.

Ms Notley: Just because we'd all like to win the lottery doesn't mean that we're all going to win the lottery.

You know, for a year straight this Premier lauded this deal, routinely lumping it in as the solution to every problem his incompetence created. Job creation: Keystone. Pandemic response: Keystone. Infrastructure fund: Keystone. My question is this: when \$1.3 billion could have easily built new schools for kids, a hospital for Red Deer, repaired homes in northeast Calgary, or added an entire lane on highway 2 both ways, does the Premier regret signing that deal?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, one thing we don't regret is standing up for the energy industry, something the members never did one day when they were in office. We will continue to advocate without apology for pipelines, for the industry that creates the most wealth not only in this province but the sector that creates the most wealth across the nation.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to KXL, we committed barrels, not dollars.

This Premier is more of a lame duck than a fiscal hawk. You know, the Premier's fight-back strategy includes a never-ending inquiry, a war room hunting for Bigfoot, and a \$1.3 billion boondoggle. That's how they stand up for the energy industry. I assume that there is accounting for this mess somewhere; I assume that it's somewhere up in the sky palace close to the liquor cabinet. I'll ask again: why won't this Premier support a fully independent public inquiry into how he lost \$1.3 billion?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, this government has been very transparent with Albertans at the inception of the investment in KXL. We've been very transparent in Budget 2021 in terms of the exposure of this government. Again, we will continue to support the energy industry. We will continue to be a proponent of pipelines, of egress, something the members opposite never did. They were against Keystone XL, they were against Energy East, and they were against Northern Gateway.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

University of Alberta Funding

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know what else \$1.3 billion would have done? It would have helped offset almost all of the

Premier's cuts to our postsecondary institutions. Instead, you only have to read the *Edmonton Journal* today to see the generational damage being done to the University of Alberta alone: a massive \$170 million cut leading to restructuring, staff cuts, tuition hikes, and cancelled programs. The U of A should be a key plank of any real economic recovery plan. Instead, the Premier is tearing it down brick by brick. Why is he stalling out the very engine of our economic recovery?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, we understand how important our postsecondary institutions are in equipping Albertans with the skills they need to reach their fullest potential and to prepare for a career in a modern economy. We want to make sure that postsecondary institutions like the U of A will be here to serve Albertans for generations to come. But here's the challenge. Over the last decade the U of A has had a per-student funding level that far exceeds the majority of other institutions across Canada, and this is unsustainable. We need to make changes if we want the U of A to be in a position to serve future generations of Albertans, and we are committed to working with the U of A to make sure it has a bright future.

Ms Notley: You have a very strange idea of a bright future.

Now, the U of A has actually seen the deepest cuts of any postsecondary institution in Alberta. More than 25 per cent of their operating grant: gone. Last week an update from QS world university rankings had the U of A slipping to 126th in the world, out of the top 100, where it was when we left office and that Premier wandered in. Why doesn't the Premier stop his unprecedented attack before this damage to Alberta's flagship institution is permanent?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would be critical of a world-class institution like the U of A for focusing on continuous improvement and focusing on building a stronger and healthier organization that's better equipped to serve Albertans today and in the future. I'm proud of the work that the U of A has done to apply more technology and innovation in their operations to help reduce their administrative costs by \$95 million annually. They've been proactively focusing their resources in the areas where they need it most, which is in improving the student experience. We will continue to work with the U of A to ensure that they are able to deliver on what Albertans expect and have the skills they need to succeed in the modern economy.

Ms Notley: It is clear this Premier is committed to attacking Alberta's postsecondary history. That includes Campus Saint-Jean, the only French-language university west of Manitoba, one that's existed for more than a century. Now, we know there's about \$4 million . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Notley: . . . from Ottawa that Alberta could scoop up to help save Campus Saint-Jean and secure its future, yet this government won't commit to matching it. Nope. Is the Premier so committed to destroying the University of Alberta that he won't take free money from Ottawa? What is his issue?

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

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government does not direct funding to Campus Saint-Jean. The Alberta government funds the U of A, and the U of A makes decisions about funding for Campus Saint-Jean. Mr. Speaker, what I will tell you is that we have been

focused on making sure that our Alberta 2030 plan for post-secondary institutions will help us to get to a stronger and more innovative and entrepreneurial culture at the U of A. In fact, on some of those efforts, the U of A President Bill Flanagan spoke about the deconsolidation efforts that will help to unleash . . .

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

COVID-19 Related Measures Act

Ms Sigurdson: The government is rightly receiving a lot of public backlash on Bill 70, which strips away the right of grieving families to sue for negligence for actions that caused people to die during COVID-19. That's right; people died because of negligent behaviour, and this government is passing legislation to give those responsible a get-out-of-jail-free card. It's gross and immoral. We know the Minister of Health likes to meet behind closed doors with well-funded lobbyists. To the Premier, the minister keeps avoiding our questions on this terrible bill. Will the Premier tell us which lobbyists were consulted and why grieving families were shut out entirely?

Mr. Shandro: None, Mr. Speaker. We listened to the physicians. The AMA supports this. We listened to those who are the operators of our continuing care. We listened to AHS. Bill 70 helps protect the health care providers that the NDP want to pretend that they support, but they actually do not by not supporting Bill 70, which is going to support our regulated health professionals and those who operate the facilities that provide the care for Albertans, operate in good faith in much the same way that they do in other provinces, to provide the same level of protection in other provinces for these types of professionals.

Ms Sigurdson: The lobbyist registry makes it clear that the government met behind closed doors with private industry on Bill 70, and let's be clear that this terrible legislation prevents grieving families from suing organizations who were negligent during COVID-19, that caused the deaths of their loved ones. It even allows for lawsuits that have already been filed to be retroactively cancelled, and with all of this, grieving families can't even get a meeting. To the Premier: if I arrange a meeting for you, will you commit to sitting down with families grieving loved ones, who want justice before this terrible Bill 70 . . .

Mr. Shandro: A lot was incorrect there, Mr. Speaker. First of all, Bill 70 does not take away the right to sue. It does not retroactively cancel any lawsuits. It does apply retroactively but does not cancel or extinguish any lawsuits as Ontario's equivalent legislation did do. What it is doing – and we've been very clear – is that any existing lawsuit can proceed. It simply needs to be amended to the standard of gross negligence. The standard is not new here in Alberta in our legislation. It's in wide use in many different sectors. The amendment should not be an undue burden on the plaintiffs or on the law firm that has filed the lawsuit in question.

2:00

Ms Sigurdson: Grieving families deserve better than Bill 70, which strips away their right to seek justice for negligent behaviour. Albertans are disgusted in the most visceral way with the morally bankrupt Bill 70. Premier, please do the right thing. Lobbyists and for-profit companies get their way with Bill 70, and the grieving families get screwed. Pull this bill today. Talk to these families. Will the Premier do this here and now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, my door is always open to any Albertan who wants to discuss any issue related to health care. But let's be clear that the NDP are not telling the truth when it comes to Bill 70. The truth is that this is a bill that is supported by our regulated professionals, by their colleges, by their associations . . .

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

Mr. Shandro: . . . including the AMA, Mr. Speaker, including AHS. Now, I understand that the NDP want to leverage COVID to try and drive the nonprofits, the faith-based groups that provide care in the long-term care sector, drive them out of the ability to . . .

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

Antiracism and Multiculturalism Policies

Mr. Deol: In the wake of the horrifying racist attacks we have seen in London, the MPs for Edmonton Mill Woods and Calgary Nose Hill have apologized for their role in divisive policies like the niqab ban and the promotion of the barbaric cultural practices snitch line. The Premier has claimed in recent days to be a champion of antiracism and has pledged to help combat racism, but wounds of the past run deep. This Premier was the architect of a policy to ban the niqab. Will the Premier follow the example of his federal Conservative colleagues and apologize for his role in the horrific practices and policies of the past?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Again, it is shameful that the Member for Edmonton-Meadows would stand before the floor of this particular House and accuse the Premier of Alberta of racist intentions. There is no political leader in this country that I know – and I say this as someone who knows this Premier very well – who has worked so hard to build bridges and alliances across this country for minority cultural communities. I have seen that firsthand. I am proud of this Premier.

Mr. Deol: The niqab ban was a racist policy. That's beyond any doubt. Many, many Canadians have called the policy dangerous and disgusting, yet in a 2015 interview the Premier said that he was proud to implement the niqab ban in his role as a minister of immigration. The Premier said the niqab was grounded in a, quote, medieval, tribal culture. The Premier's policy and words hurt Muslim communities and families. His federal colleagues have now apologized. Is the Premier still proud of his decision to put the niqab ban into force, yes or no?

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, all that the NDP does is virtue signal. In 2016 while the NDP was in charge of our province, there was a real, actual, racist act perpetrated against a black person at the Grande Prairie hospital. That was reported through the chains of command. The NDP did nothing in 2016, 2017, 2018. We will not be lectured to about racism by the members opposite, who sit by and do nothing.

Mr. Deol: The MP for Calgary Nose Hill said that her greatest regret was being silent on the issues of the barbaric cultural practices tip line and the niqab ban, and the MP for Edmonton Mill Woods apologized, saying that he now understands how these policies contributed to the growing problem of Islamophobia in Canada. This Premier was the creator of the niqab ban. His colleagues now see the harm of this policy. Will the Premier admit that policies he put in force as the minister of immigration helped

spread anti-Muslim hate, and what is the Premier going to do now to heal the community after he caused so much harm?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, as minister of immigration for our country this Premier welcomed more immigrants from across the globe than any other immigration minister in the history of our country. You know the nickname that cultural communities gave the Premier? The Minister of Curry in a Hurry. No Canadian minister has ever toured cultural minority communities in this country more than this particular Premier. As Premier the Premier has led a government that has done more to make sure that we confront racism, and I am proud of the work that we are doing together.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at 2:01 a point of order was noted by the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a question.

Senate Elections and Appointments

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1989 Alberta passed legislation that would allow Albertans to elect nominees to the Canadian Senate. While the federal government was not bound by these elections, this gave Albertans the chance to let their voices be heard. When in government the NDP did not renew the Senatorial Selection Act and took away Albertans' right to nominate Senators. As promised, our government reintroduced this important legislation. To the Minister of Justice: Minister, can you tell the House why it's important to bring back and provide democratic input to Albertans on Senate appointments?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Member for Grande Prairie for that very important question. Albertans deserve to have a direct, democratic say on their representatives in Parliament. The Prime Minister should avoid appointing new Senators this summer before a likely fall federal election and instead wait for Albertans to have their say during the Alberta Senate nominee elections scheduled for this particular fall. The democratic will of Albertans must be respected by all in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that Alberta was the only province to give its citizens a voice in senatorial appointments and given that similar Senate reforms have been popular in Alberta, across the west, and in other parts of Canada for decades and further given that Albertans want a say in who represents them at all levels of government, to the same minister: can you explain why it's important that Albertans have the opportunity to pick our Senators instead of a decision from Ottawa?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It is vitally important that Albertans get to determine who represents them. After all, that is how we choose our representatives, and the people's representatives must be the ones that have been decided and elected by the people of this particular province. The red Chamber must have Senators who have been cleared, elected by the people of Alberta, and I am looking forward to the Senate election in the fall of this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that Alberta currently has two senatorial vacancies and given that the current Prime Minister could appoint whomever he chooses to fill these positions, regardless of the wishes of Albertans, but further given that Albertans are scheduled to nominate our choices for the Senate in October of this year, to the same minister: what is the provincial government doing to ensure Albertans' voices are heard in Ottawa and our chosen senatorial nominees from this October will be duly considered?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Member for Grande Prairie for that question once again. Alberta has already been without two Senators for over 160 days. I do think that Alberta can still afford to wait an extra 125 days so that Albertans can have a say in who gets to represent them at the red Chamber. The NDP formally favours Senate abolition and has opposed democratically elected Senators. After all, the NDP let the Alberta Senate Election Act expire in 2016. My hope is that they would work with us to make sure that we elect our people's representatives.

Coal Development Policy Consultation

Mr. Schmidt: This government's failure to consult is a source of heated debate in this House on a daily basis. They tried to sell off Alberta's parks without asking if it was okay, they've imposed a fee in Kananaskis Country that many wished they would have been asked if they were willing to pay, and they rescinded the 1976 coal policy on a Friday afternoon, before the long weekend, after only talking to billionaire coal companies. If I'm wrong about this, can the Minister of Energy list for this House which Albertans were consulted before the policy was pulled?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy is working through a robust consultation process when it comes to the coal policy, including around the 1976 coal policy, that includes Albertans from all across the province – indigenous communities, industry, environmentalist groups – and that will continue to go forward. We look forward to seeing the results of that committee.

One of the things that they will be looking into is that that member and his former government, who worked to open up category 2 lands – that's actually when it took place under the NDP. That's just one of the issues that the coal committee will be looking into, and we look forward to the report.

2:10

Mr. Schmidt: Given that we asked in Public Accounts this morning if First Nations were consulted before the coal policy was pulled and officials present couldn't give us a straight answer and given that we certainly have a rush of outcry from indigenous people after the full extent of this government's horrific coal mining policy was revealed and given that there is a duty to consult indigenous people as defined by law and spelled out clearly in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, can the minister tell this House if they consulted indigenous people before moving to tear down our mountains, and can she be specific about who exactly she talked to?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, indigenous communities are a very important part of the coal consultation. The Minister of Energy has

been clear on that. That hon. member even talking about that is rich, though, considering that just two years ago he was part of a government who did not consult anybody in Clearwater county, including the four First Nation communities that call that place home, who have fundamentally rejected the approach that the NDP have taken to consulting indigenous communities. The Minister of Energy will continue to consult indigenous communities and make sure their voices are heard loud and clear through the coal community.

Mr. Speaker, while we're at it, maybe the member could apologize to the Piikani as he tried to go onto their reserve without their permission this weekend.

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Given that it'll be a cold day in a hot place before I apologize to that minister and given that landowners in the Ermineskin and Whitefish Lake First Nations have filed separate requests for a judicial review of the decision to rip up the 1976 coal policy and given that just yesterday we saw the Métis Nation of Alberta speak out as it filed legal action against the government after it cancelled the planned consultation policy and given that this government could avoid going to court again, did the minister get any legal advice before tearing up the 1976 coal policy? Did lawyers warn her that doing this would land her in court and ruin relationships with indigenous leaders?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted raised by the opposition deputy House leader at 2:11.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has apologized to me many times for his behaviour inside this House. You can read it in *Hansard*. In fact, I suspect he's apologized in this Chamber more than any of the 87 members, including for wishing a former great politician to be dead earlier than she was. It's appalling.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, through you to him, I've asked if he would apologize to the Piikani, the First Nation community that he and colleagues tried to enter without contacting the nation and had to be stopped by security. Is that what he calls indigenous consultation? This government is focused on real, hard work with indigenous communities to get it right. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Oldman River Basin Water Allocation

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the UCP proposed to drastically alter water allocation for the Oldman River water basin in November, allowing half of available water to be set aside for two pending coal mines. Albertans disagree with this, and the UCP have not been clear on if they have followed through or not. This proposal takes away water from communities and farms and redirects it to coal mines. For the sake of clarity will the Minister of Environment and Parks confirm that the proposed water reallocation has not and will not go through?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, it's unfortunate to see the Official Opposition and others misrepresenting conversations that have happened around the Oldman water allocation. To be very, very clear, the only thing that has been discussed was increasing capacity within that allocation to protect aquatic environments within the Oldman River basin. That's been discussed but has not

been decided. To be very, very clear, if that was to take place, that would mean that industry would get less water. That said, no decisions have been made when it comes to the allocation, and this government will not be moving forward in any way to increase that water allocation to industry inside the Oldman River basin. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the UCP have not been transparent when it comes to protecting water, wildlands, and parks but Albertans could not be more clear on their opposition to this government's plan to mine the eastern slopes and given that UCP MLAs ran the clock on my motion yesterday to protect the Oldman River water basin so they would not have to put their out-of-touch position on the record and given that this has only served to further anger Albertans who are deeply concerned about the destruction that this government is planning to do to our critical waterways, will the minister commit today that no water from the Oldman River water basin will ever be redirected to coal mines?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would have the nerve to stand in this Chamber and accuse the government of running out the clock on a motion, referring to the fact that the Official Opposition yesterday filibustered bills that have already been approved to be debated in this Chamber, trying to stop – get this – a reservists' appreciation bill from being debated in this Chamber. Only the NDP would do that inside this Chamber. At this point you should not be surprised. That's the way the NDP act.

Ms Sweet: So that's a no, Minister.

Given that the water from the Oldman River basin is essential for agriculture – the UCP-proposed changes not only reallocate necessary water, but coal mining could also contaminate it – and given that farmers from across the province have reached out to me to express their concerns about the UCP plans for water and continuously plead for the UCP to listen and given that it's becoming more apparent that the UCP are continuously ignoring rural Albertans, will the minister listen now, not go forward with reallocating headwaters on the eastern slopes? Minister, no more sidestepping, no more rhetoric. Commit to Albertans right here and now that you're not going to mess with their water.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we've been clear that there are no changes coming towards that issue at all. Over and over we've been clear, but again you continue to see the Official Opposition, the NDP, just making things up. We need to go back to the last question from the hon. member. Her party, yesterday in this Chamber, filibustered legislation that had already been agreed to by all parties to be debated in here, to block – to block – a reservists' appreciation bill. The NDP will stop at nothing to play politics, and they cannot be trusted. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Peace River is next.

Legislature Grounds and Public Infrastructure

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When my constituents visit this iconic Legislature, dodging concrete brutalist public art which, it would seem, was designed only to replicate the soul-sucking effect of a Soviet prison block, they notice something: construction fences surrounding part of the fountains and the Legislature Grounds and industrial dumpsters around the Annex building. Can the Minister of Infrastructure update this House on

the status of the fountains and when the Annex building will be destroyed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My opinions on architecture aren't quite as fancy as the ones expressed by the member that just asked the question. However, it turns out that knocking down the Annex was three times less expensive than it would have cost to repair it. It says here that it will not be missed. In fairness, I am the only one that ever served there that actually said that I like the place, but I've heard a lot of my colleagues say that they didn't like the place at all. But here's the unfortunate part: the fountains, which people will miss, are also broken.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, given that British public commentator Roger Scruton once said: "This building is [poorly done] because nobody has a use for it. Nobody has a use for it because nobody wants to be in it. Nobody wants to be in it because the thing is so damned ugly", you could be forgiven for thinking that Mr. Scruton was talking about our own Annex building or any number of other public buildings designed by Alberta in the soul-sucking postmodern fashion, can the Minister of Infrastructure inform this House if the government will build simple, elegant, traditional public buildings again, or are we sticking to the ugly, useless, expensive blueprints we've been using?

Mr. McIver: To finish my previous answer, it's important that the House knows that the fountains, when they were turned on, were under terrible repair, and they had to be shut off.

The member, again, has a fancier opinion on architecture than I do, but we do know that the Legislature Grounds are a mix of both a beautiful historic sandstone building and what some would call a brutalist design. We do want to hear from the public about the future of these grounds and how we could best make these grounds a place that all Albertans can come and enjoy, because these grounds belong to Albertans.

Mr. Williams: Given that a recent U.S. executive order declared in law that public buildings should uplift and beautify public spaces, inspiring the human spirit – we, however, Mr. Speaker, are not American, but as a Canadian I believe we have our own architectural traditions to choose from to uplift and inspire Albertans: the Scottish baronial style of Banff Springs, the neoclassical style of this building, and, of course, the neo-Gothic style of Parliament, amongst others – can this minister discuss with cabinet a policy of beauty and tradition in Alberta architecture, similar to the executive order, and where can Albertans provide public feedback on an urgent call for beauty in our civic spaces again?

Mr. McIver: All this architecture talk: I can only think that I should have stayed in school, Mr. Speaker. I should have listened to my mother.

Albertans are welcome to let the Minister of Infrastructure know their thoughts on the Legislature Grounds and all provincial buildings by e-mailing infrastructure.minister@gov.ab.ca. If we repair the fountains and scrap the Annex, what should we do for other improvements? Our public buildings in many cases are a true reflection of the province, and we should be showing the best of Alberta to our province, visitors, guests, and foreign investors. I can certainly agree with that, Mr. Speaker. The Legislature Grounds are a real gem, and we need to hear from Albertans.

2:20 Accessibility in Legislature and Government Services

Ms Renaud: It's a tremendous responsibility to be able to represent our constituents in this Chamber, but to many Albertans this Chamber is inaccessible. Our caucus sought to improve that accessibility by pushing for a study to see how we can utilize and provide access to services like ASL, American sign language. The UCP voted down our request for a study. That's right. This government won't even look into how to improve accessibility. Status quo is good enough for them. Does the minister believe that all Albertans should be able to engage with this Legislature equally or not? Are they worth the investment?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for that question, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to it. It's important to have inclusive communication everywhere, and certainly I know that members within their constituency offices have access to budgets to ensure that they can use American sign language or different languages to ensure that they have appropriate and inclusive communication for their constituents.

Ms Renaud: Given that the members for Calgary-West, Lethbridge-East, Peace River, West Yellowhead, Highwood, and Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche voted down a request to study improving accessibility and given that I am hell-bent on making sure their constituents know it and given that I hear constantly from Albertans who feel unable to connect with this Legislature and who tell me that existing systems exclude them and given that the reality is that the Minister of Community and Social Services needs to stop hiding behind a committee – she has the ability to fix these issues – Minister, will you commit to a full study and public report on accessibility in this Legislature?

Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

The Speaker: I hesitate to provide comment; however, I might just suggest that this isn't a matter over which the minister has purview. This is a matter of the MSC. The committee made a decision. The member may not like it. She'll know that the Assembly is undertaking a number of initiatives around American sign language. I will provide the minister the opportunity to provide a response, but the question posed is clearly about committee matters, not about government business.

The hon. the minister should she choose to do so.

Accessibility in Legislature and Government Services (continued)

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond. Again, I'll just reiterate that members have money in their budgets to make sure that they can promote inclusive education. It's really important to note that this is in alignment with other jurisdictions like the House of Commons, and it is really important to note that we are not an outlier in this matter.

Ms Renaud: Given that this government has made life more difficult for Albertans with disabilities with deindexing, date changes, and so much more and given that they didn't listen to the concerns of disabled Albertans when it came to those decisions and given that cuts in these critical areas were made so the Premier could shovel billions to his corporate CEOs as part of his corporate handout and his \$1.3 billion bet on Donald Trump's pipeline to nowhere, can the minister explain to Albertans why CEOs and profitable companies get billions but disabled Albertans can't be

assured that they will have barrier-free communication to all of the work of government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's alternative communications policy outlines its commitment to provide equitable access to information for Albertans with alternative communication needs, so that inclusive portion is built in. The government works with Deaf & Hear Alberta to provide American sign language translation during the chief medical officer of health's updates and other critical media events. In order to ensure Albertans have access to the critical, up-to-date information they require to stay safe, it is provided in a variety of formats.

Police and Crime Prevention

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I'm getting numerous e-mails from municipalities speaking out against this government's plan to replace the RCMP with a provincial police force. Experts have gone on record to say that the proposal could cost the province billions. These municipalities can't afford to pick up the bill, not after the barrage of funding cuts levelled on them by this government. Will the minister commit today to cancelling any plans to introduce a provincial police force until he can prove that it won't cost Albertans more and will actually do some real good for this province?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. We commissioned a provincial police transition study, and we have received the report of that particular study. We are studying the recommendations made in that particular report. But I can assure that if we decide to proceed with a new provincial police service, that would not cost Albertans billions of dollars.

Member Ceci: Given that this government commissioned a \$2 million report to investigate the possibility of replacing the Alberta RCMP with a provincial police force and given that the report was due on April 30 – yet the government is still hiding the results from Albertans – will the minister release the report before the spring sitting concludes, or is he afraid that its contents will make it clear that replacing the RCMP is a dumb idea and that he knows Albertans won't support it?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, what is a dumb idea is not making sure that all Albertans, regardless of where they live in this particular province, get the same level of service as every other Albertan in urban centres. This government is committed to making sure that we'll protect Albertans. We'll ensure that they receive the services that they require, and we will get the job done. When it is time for us to release the report, we will release the report.

Member Ceci: Why hide the report?

Given that after the strain of the pandemic, rural communities are already struggling to make ends meet and given that this government already made changes to the funding model in December 2019, leaving small, rural communities on the hook for the cost of policing, and given that this government promised to get tough on rural crime but have ignored real action that would actually help bring down crime rates in rural areas – action like addressing poverty, supporting those with addictions, and funding

mental health services – will this minister get to work on doing things to actually bring down the crime rate? This government is wasting money chasing fantasies on . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. You know, for four years Albertans in various rural communities called upon this government to listen to them, to hear their cries of violence, that their communities and their people are not safe. For four years the NDP did nothing. I recall my predecessor calling upon the NDP to accompany him on a rural tour to hear first-hand the complaints of Albertans living in rural communities. The members opposite did not take him up on that particular offer. We will not listen to the NDP on this particular issue. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a question.

Technology Industry and Economic Diversification

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mphasis, a global leader in information technology services, has chosen Calgary as its headquarters for operations in Canada. Given that the economy of Alberta is beginning its recovery from the setback of the pandemic and further given that the diversification of our economy is seen as a key aspect of the recovery, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: what does this investment bring in the long term for Alberta and Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for that question. Tangible diversification of the Alberta economy: we have seen exponential growth in the technology sector here in our province. Just in the last two years alone we've gone from 1,200 tech companies to over 3,000: larger companies, more investment, thousands of jobs. Now we're seeing major international technology companies call Alberta home. We're proud that diversification is happening right now in Alberta.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the oil and gas industry remains an integral part of our province's economy, with many hard-working Albertans relying on this industry to support themselves and their families – I might also take this moment to add that Alberta's energy industry is the most responsible in the world – to the same minister: how will the growth of the tech industry and the diversification of our economy in Calgary and Alberta as a whole complement the energy industry and attract even more foreign investment to our province?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, there is some good news happening right now in the energy industry in Alberta: 14,000 more people are working in the energy industry today than before the pandemic began. Let me repeat that: 14,000 more today than before the pandemic began. That might shock the members opposite, but that's good news for Albertans: \$2 billion-plus of investment in hydrogen, \$2 billion-plus in renewable power, private sector driven. Plus, we're seeing technology companies like mCloud, an artificial intelligence company, moving here to service the energy industry.

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

2:30

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to hear such good news. Given that the unemployment rate in Alberta has now dropped to its lowest level since the pandemic began and further given that diversifying our economy will play a key role in recovery and will create new opportunities that should continue to drive the unemployment rate down, to the same minister: what programs are in place to help unemployed Albertans train for new industries and continue to make Alberta more attractive for companies like Mphasis to invest in us?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our minister of labour has launched the jobs now program, which has an immense amount of interest, a \$370 million program to reduce the burden of training new hires and get people back into the workforce. That is exciting news. We're forecasted right now to lead the country in economic growth, not just this year but next year as well, with job creation coming along with it. It's a proud time for Alberta to see the growth across many industries – our main economic drivers of energy, agriculture, forestry – plus the diversification that's happening right now in the tech sector, the film and television industry. The NDP don't like it, but we're starting to . . .

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

Queen Elizabeth II Highway 65th Avenue Interchange in Leduc

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, back in 2018 the previous government came to an agreement with the city of Leduc and the Edmonton International Airport to construct the 65th Avenue interchange, a critical piece of economic infrastructure. But then this UCP government was elected, and the project stopped. They sat on their hands for a year and a half before reannouncing the same project with the same details, but now three years since it was originally funded, the project still is not under construction. The people of the Leduc and Edmonton regions deserve better. I want to know why, from the minister, the endless delays on this project continue.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can only recommend that the hon. member talk to some of the people from the Edmonton region and the airport, because we talk to them every week. Our hon. member from that area, Leduc-Beaumont, is very, very involved. We're in active conversation with the airport and the municipality. We're working together, and 65th Avenue is something important that we hope to get done.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you. Given that active conversation has gotten zero dollars from the federal government so far and given that this project is critical for the Edmonton International Airport, Leduc, and the entire capital region to grow commercial and cargo traffic while expanding logistical networks to support business and given that the previous government had applied for some federal funding under the investing in Canada infrastructure program to lower the financial burden on all the parties involved and given that this application went in three years ago – I know the Minister of Transportation is trying to secure funding, having conversations, as he said, but when can he call Ottawa and get this project moving?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, we finally heard what the member is really after. He's actually not complaining to us; he's complaining to the federal government for not writing the money, and he's admitting that his government was completely ineffective

in getting anything moving. We haven't given up on the file, though. We're working together with the airport, with the municipality. Our MLA for Leduc-Beaumont is, frankly, in my face on a regular basis in support of trying to get this done. Through those efforts I expect that at some point we will, but we're not quite there yet.

Mr. Dach: Given that this 65th Avenue interchange is a win-win-win project and given that this project is a sure bet that would drive economic growth and create jobs and given that the Premier could find \$1.3 billion to bet on Donald Trump getting re-elected – he lost, by the way – but he can't seem to scrounge up the funds to support the good people of Leduc and given that this \$50 million they want from the federal government is something the provincial government can come up with themselves to get this project on the road, why in the world will the provincial government not decide that they will come up – regardless of whether the federal government comes through, to get this project under way on their own? Worry about the money later.

Mr. McIver: There's one to mark in the book: do what you want to do and worry about the money later. Wow. There you go, Mr. Speaker. There's the difference between our government and the NDP. We try to do things in a responsible way. We try to work with people. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation has the call.

Mr. McIver: There's the difference between us and the NDP: spend the money; don't worry about it. Mr. Speaker, we're taking a bit of a different approach. We're trying to be responsible. I think that we don't want to walk away from money from the federal government on a project this important. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont is working hard.

Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood Constituency Concerns

Member Irwin: In my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is the Alberta Health Services Eastwood zone. Eastwood has some of the lowest vaccination rates across the city, 20 per cent lower than some areas. There are many factors accounting for this, including barriers for low-income folks, newcomers, and those for whom English isn't their first language. As the MLA for this area I will do all I can to try to increase awareness, but I'm going to need this government's help. Will the Minister of Health commit to working with me to come up with a targeted outreach plan so that we can prioritize helping to get folks vaccinated throughout my riding? I can clear my calendar this afternoon and meet with you.

Mr. Shandro: Well, the answer, of course, Mr. Speaker, is yes, as I have with the members opposite. They signed a joint letter, all of them, their entire caucus, to meet to identify one particular group that they asked for us to work with in setting up a temporary clinic within 24 hours. We're doing the work to be able to stand up that temporary clinic. I'm very happy to work with all members of this Legislature to make sure that everybody in this Chamber has the information that they can to make sure that everybody in their communities is getting the vaccine, that we can increase our vaccine uptake in all communities throughout the province. I continue to look forward to providing whatever information we can and working with all members of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Given that we know that the same area, the Eastwood zone, has a significantly larger percentage of single parents than the province at large and that for many low-income families in my riding affordable, quality child care was life changing and that I've talked to parents who lost access when this government ended the pilot, and they're desperately struggling right now – no parent should have to choose between looking after their kids and getting a vaccine. No parent should have to choose between staying home and working because they don't have child care. Can this government not understand just how much access to child care impacts families? Why won't they prioritize it?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we have absolutely prioritized child care, and I can tell you that the Minister of Children's Services is hard at work on this file. In fact, right now she's engaging with her federal counterpart to talk about what the national program is going to look like and what it's going to look like here in Alberta. Again I want to say that we are absolutely prioritizing child care.

Member Irwin: While vaccination rates are low, the rates of overdose deaths are high, higher in my riding than anywhere else in the city. We proposed an evidence-based three-point plan, and we're urging this government to implement it before more lives are lost, including expanding supervised consumption sites across the province, providing safe, legal, regulated pharmaceutical alternatives, and introducing drug testing to help with addressing toxic drugs. To the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. The question is simple. I don't want to see any more of my constituents die. I don't want to see more Albertans die. Will you adopt our plan? Why not? Lives depend on it.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll put the question to the members opposite: will they commit to working with government? We are not replacing or taking away harm reduction as part of the spectrum that is provided to those who suffer from addiction; we are adding opportunities for recovery. Will the members opposite commit to working with government in providing those opportunities for recovery, to integrating harm reduction services with the health care system, to make sure that everybody who suffers from addiction can get the care that they need, that everybody can have that opportunity for recovery? Recovery works.

Mr. Dach: They've got to be alive to do that.

The Speaker: Order.

Public Lands and Campgrounds

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, with ever-increasing numbers of people in the west country camping, quadding, riding horses, hiking, fishing, hunting, climbing, enjoying the great outdoors, we've had increasing problems with litter and overcrowding. Recently Alberta's government invested money in building new washrooms at Lake Abraham, which have been vandalized and are now unusable. Money needs to be allocated to maintain these facilities. To the minister of environment. Infrastructure spending without maintenance gets lost. How is Alberta's government going to maintain these investments?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we continue to make significant historical investments in our recreation areas in the province, a sharp contrast to the Official Opposition when they

were in government, who invested nothing and just focused instead on cutting ribbons and making announcements. In 2020 and 2021 alone we are doing \$300 million worth of capital inside recreation areas, including \$158 million just specifically to recreation around tourism and conservation; \$43 million of that going to improvements to trails and campgrounds; \$1 million, for example, going to the David Thompson corridor that the hon. member refers to: millions of dollars being invested to be able to make sure that we can protect these important areas.

Mr. Orr: Thank you for the answer. Mr. Speaker, given that several provincial park campgrounds in the Prairie Creek area have deteriorated over time and given that maintenance has virtually been nonexistent and further given that these campsites are often half empty because of poor service and infrastructure when private campgrounds right beside them are full, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: how are you working to improve facilities and service delivery in these campgrounds?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been working with our partners. Unfortunately, when the NDP was in government, they froze out the park partnerships that had taken place all across the province for 90 years. We've been able to rebuild those partnerships, and we're proud that there are 170 new partnerships, particularly around some of these remote campgrounds in the area that the hon. member is referring to. One of the great examples of that is the Friends of the Eastern Slopes, who we're working very closely with to deal with some of the toilet issues that the hon. member referred to in his last question, the point being that we're going to invest inside our campgrounds. We're also going to work side by side with Albertans to protect their special areas. We're going to continue to reject the NDP's approach of freezing Albertans out of their own backyard.

2:40

Mr. Orr: Thank you for the answer. Mr. Speaker, given that the increased visitation in the west country has led to an increase in dangerous situations by aggressive people and given that Alberta's public lands require enforcement, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to fund and increase enforcement on public lands so that people feel safe with their families in the great outdoors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that we heard loud and clear from Albertans is that they wanted to see an increase in investment in enforcement inside our special areas, where they recreate, in the province. This government took an unprecedented step, that has not happened in this province in decades. It has hired 20 new, armed conservation officers and 30 new full-time employees working within our recreation areas in the province. This is why we're bringing forward modest fees for random camping in places like the Kananaskis conservation pass, so we can make sure the resources are there to keep Albertans safe while they utilize these special places, to protect these special places for future generations, and, most importantly, to keep them open for Albertans, a fundamental rejection of the NDP's approach, which was to lock Albertans out of their own backyard.

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

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Bill 220 Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 220, Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021.

This bill addresses what many consider the last taboo, miscarriage and stillbirth. It is estimated that 1 in 4 women suffer a miscarriage. Bill 220 clarifies that parents that suffer the loss of their child through miscarriage or stillbirth can take the time they need to mourn without fear of losing their jobs. If passed, Bill 220 would extend bereavement leave to women and their partners following a miscarriage or stillbirth. The bill also clarifies that anyone who would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy is eligible for job-protected leave. Losing one's child is a tragedy, and Bill 220 ensures that parents have the protection they need to grieve their profound loss.

I look forward to discussing this with my colleagues and stakeholders over the course of the summer, and I encourage all members of this House to support this important bill.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 220 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of letters I received from senior citizens, residents at The View, a retirement community in Lethbridge. The letters outline the concern for continuing rent increases they are experiencing and have been signed by several residents. I have the requisite number of copies.

The Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have two tablings for you today. The first is a tabling on behalf of workers at the Spy Hill corrections facility who are opposed to the replacement of in-house infrastructure staff at their facility.

As well, a petition from the workers at Michener Centre, who are also opposed to the replacement of workers in their facility.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert is next.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a copy of a letter from the mayor of St. Albert, Cathy Heron, addressed to the Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs as well as the associate minister of natural gas, among other people, expressing serious concerns about the eastern slopes coal mining engagement. She encourages a more comprehensive review and the inclusion of water and land use.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 1:56 the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order, which he subsequently withdrew, and at 2:01 the Official Opposition deputy House leader rose on a point of order, which he may address now.

Mr. Dang: Withdrawn.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded. His second point of order, at 2:11.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 2:11 p.m. today, without the benefit of the Blues, I believe the Minister of Environment and Parks, referring to my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, stated that he should apologize to the Piikani for trying to go on their land without permission this weekend. He then stated in a subsequent response to a question a similar variation of that. I think that this is clearly under 23(h), (i), and (j), an allegation against another member as well as making abusive and insulting language to another member.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear, in your direction in this place before, that we have been cautioned and in some cases ruled that we should not be referring to previous charges or offences by members, and certainly in cases where convictions have not occurred, they should not be referred to in this place. You'll note that throughout, I believe, the entirety of this session the opposition has refrained from making comments regarding government members or independent members in this case.

In this case my hon. colleague was invited to an event on the Piikani Nation; the invitation was later rescinded, and he, of course, respected that request from the nation. So as per your direction to the opposition in the past, Mr. Speaker, I believe the minister should avoid these topics, avoid this mudslinging, and should apologize and withdraw these comments because it is clearly unparliamentary to make these attacks when you have given direction to the opposition to refrain from this in the past.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree with the Official Opposition deputy House leader that you have been clear about referring to facts that have already been decided previously in the past.

But to be clear, first of all, this is a matter of debate. Second of all, this was in reference to a newspaper article in the *Lethbridge Herald* that was out on June 15, 2021, just recently, obviously, written by Mr. Dale Woodard. It goes on to make it clear that a group was proceeding to Brocket, which is on the Piikani First Nation, for a rally that featured, it says, "the likes of," and it quotes some people but also then refers specifically to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It then goes on to say that that group that was on their way down there, the convoy, was met by the Piikani First Nation, who stopped them from being able to enter the First Nation.

I did not say that the hon. member had been charged with anything, did anything criminal. Not at all did I refer . . .

Mr. Dang: You accused him of trespassing.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I remained silent during the hon. member's point of order argument. I'm sure he can do me the same courtesy.

The point is that I haven't referred to saying that he would do anything illegal, that he did anything that was against the law, Mr. Speaker. I assume that he has not and has not been charged with anything. I don't know if the NDP wants to disclose that he has. The point is that there is a newspaper article. If that newspaper

article is wrong, I would say that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar should ask them to reprint that. But clearly the article says that they were blocked from entering the Piikani First Nation, and my honest suggestion would be that I would apologize, if I was him, to the First Nation community that was involved. That's up to him.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day this is a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there other submissions?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. While I appreciate the hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader's remarks with respect to personal attacks, I think that what we've seen here is an ongoing debate about: did he or did he not? Again, I think that the hon. Government House Leader has clarified that at no point did he accuse the member of doing something criminal and therefore did not make an accusation about the criminality of the event.

I don't consider this a point of order. A dispute of the facts and a continuance of the debate. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

2:50

Orders of the Day Government Motions

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

Time Allocation on Bill 70

88. Mr. Madu moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 70, COVID-19 Related Measures Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 70 was introduced back on April 22 and has been called for debate on five separate days since then. The opposition has engaged in hours of repetitive debate, where they have been providing alternative facts.

I just want to quote the Minister of Health's second reading speech, which can be found on page 5332 of *Alberta Hansard* for June 8.

Without this legislation going forward, there is a greater risk that threatens the provision of health services in the province. It creates the conditions for increased litigation against hospitals, against clinics, against our doctors, against our nurses, against our pharmacists, and against workers in continuing care facilities. Financial resources would have to be diverted from delivering health services to dealing with legal claims, and this is not a scenario that Alberta's health care providers need during a pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I think that provides the rationale for why Bill 70 must move forward despite the objections of the NDP.

With that, I move Government Motion 88.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has moved Government Motion 88. This motion is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 21(3). The Member for Calgary-McCall has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate that closure motions, curtailing the debate motions, have become the norm in this place, which were rarely, rarely used for being heavy-handed

tools, for being undemocratic, for curtailing the debate rights of the members of this House. It is more so worrisome in the case of this specific bill, which essentially is robbing people of their right to seek justice through the courts. It's even more dangerous. It's even more undemocratic. It's on a matter where Albertans had their loved ones in senior care facilities, facilities that Alberta taxpayers paid to build, facilities where Albertans who were living there were paying to get services, and some of them didn't get the service they needed.

There were 1,250-plus deaths in our seniors homes. All those Albertans are looking for answers. They're looking for closure. They're looking to see what went wrong. They want to know what could have been done differently, and this piece of legislation is essentially stopping all those Albertans from seeking justice, from seeking closure. Instead of having a fulsome debate on this, they're bringing this heavy-handed tool to shut down debate here in this Legislature and shut down all those 1,258 families who may be looking for justice through the court system.

That is undemocratic, and that is shameful. This tool shouldn't be used like this. This is clearly an abuse of that tool. Those Albertans have every right to seek justice through the court system. They have raised concerns about the government response to COVID. They have raised concerns about the services they got from senior care facilities, and instead of standing up with those Albertans, here we have a government that is trying to shut down all those debates, trying to shut down all those Albertans, trying to shut down their concerns.

We will not be supporting this motion, that essentially robs those Albertans of their right to seek justice in the court system. That is unjust, that is undemocratic, and I urge all members of this House – the seniors who lost their lives: their families live in your ridings, too. You're accountable to your constituents, and your constituents want to have a day in court. They want to seek justice. They want to seek answers. Let them do that. Do the right thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 88 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:56 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Issik	Rowswell
Amery	Jones	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Shandro
Ellis	Long	Singh
Getson	Lovely	Stephan
Glasgo	Luan	Turton
Glubish	Madu	Walker
Goodridge	Neudorf	Williams
Gotfried	Orr	Wilson
Guthrie	Pon	Yao
Horner	Rosin	Yaseen
Hunter		

Against the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Sabir
Deol	Goehring	Sweet

Totals:	For – 34	Against – 6
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[Government Motion 88 carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
Bill 70
COVID-19 Related Measures Act

Ms Hoffman moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 70, COVID-19 Related Measures Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 70, COVID-19 Related Measures Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment June 15: Ms Pancholi speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I’ll give you 30 seconds to do what you must.

Hon. members, we are on the referral amendment. Are there any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this referral motion. I think it’s an important motion, and I will try to outline the reasons why we think that this bill should be referred and still debated on. We should hear from Albertans who have a vested interest in the subject matter of this bill.

I think what this bill is doing is two or three things. One, this bill says in section 4 that

no action for damages lies or shall be commenced or maintained against a health service facility, regional health authority or person referred to in section 2 as a direct or indirect result of an individual being or potentially being infected with or exposed to COVID-19 on or after March 1, 2020 as a direct or indirect result of an act or omission of a health service facility, regional health authority or person.

We do know that there were more than 1,250 residents that were in our senior care facilities, and those facilities were responsible for taking care of them, but, tragically, they died. Many of those families are still looking for answers. They believe, and I agree, that many of those deaths were preventable. What this provision is doing, what this bill is doing is robbing those families of their right to seek answers, to seek justice. This is what this provision is doing by “a direct or indirect result of an act or omission” of the provider. Whether they did something or whether they failed to do something, they won’t be liable.

In our society, Madam Speaker, when we undertake some responsibility, when we enter into some contract, the parties to the contract are expected to hold their side of the bargain. In this case Albertans who were in those facilities or their families were paying for their side of the bargain. They have every right to expect that they will receive the service, that they will receive the care they bargained for. In many cases they didn’t get the care they were promised. Lives were lost. There are families who are grieving.

3:20

In bringing forward this bill, government has not established why it’s necessary. Government has not shared who they consulted with. Did they talk to any one of these 1,250-plus families? If anybody on the government bench can say on the record that they talked to some grieving family, and they said, “It’s fine; take away our right to sue the provider in court,” then they should share that. In fact, government asked a private member to bring forward this bill, and then they adopted it as a government bill, so we do not know who government consulted. All we have heard is rhetoric.

Yesterday the Minister of Justice was accusing members on this side that they don’t want to protect the long-term care facilities. Nothing could be further from the truth. We want to protect these long-term care facilities. We paid for it.

Mr. Shandro: You just want them to be nationalized.

Mr. Sabir: We paid for it. They are already part nationalized. There is just one facility – I don’t want to name those facilities. During 2018 when my colleague the minister of seniors was undergoing treatment, I had the charge of this file, so I do know exactly how much money went into establishing these facilities. [interjection] If the Minister of Health wants to talk about this bill and how it will benefit him or whoever he’s dealing with, he’s free to get up and speak to this bill.

Mr. Shandro: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? We could do 29(2)(a) now.

Mr. Sabir: I think you’ve been in the House for a long time. You need to wait until I finish, and you can 29(2)(a) as well.

What this bill is doing, Madam Speaker: it’s giving protection to those care providers who didn’t hold their side of the bargain, and the government did not consult with a single family who is grieving. Not one family. If they did, show us. Who did you talk to? We have reached out to those families. Those families have joined us in consultation, in our presses. They’re not happy about this bill, and they shouldn’t be. This bill is robbing them of their opportunity to seek justice through the courts because this government failed to protect them in those senior care facilities.

This referral motion is important because we can look into the subject matter of the bill with detail. We can reach out to those families who are grieving and who want to seek justice, who want to seek answers, who want to seek closure. This motion will give those families that.

And not just that, Madam Speaker; they made this bill retroactive to March 1, 2020, the start of the pandemic. They made this bill effective – section 9: “This Act has effect on March 1, 2020.” There are many other bills that we have been asking the government to put in a coming-into-force date such as recall legislation. They won’t do that because many of them may get recalled. That’s why they don’t put a date there. But here, for the benefit of – I don’t know who they are talking to – lobbyists or some care providers, they are making it retroactive to March 1, 2020.

Again, that is unfair to those families. That is unfair to Albertans. Through ASLI grants, through many other grants Albertans have paid for these facilities, to establish these facilities. Our money has been used to establish these facilities. They got money from the public purse to establish those facilities, and they promised that they will be diligent in providing those services to our seniors. Many of them did provide those services, but there are some who didn’t provide the services that these grieving families were expecting them to provide.

By referring this to the committee, they will have the opportunity to come before that committee to share their grievances, to share their side of the story, because so far what we have heard in this debate is all kinds of rhetoric and accusations that we don’t want to protect these facilities. Why wouldn’t we want to protect these facilities? We paid for these facilities. Our money has been used to establish these facilities. We absolutely want to protect these facilities but not at the cost of our seniors. So referring this bill to the committee will give those families opportunity to share their thoughts with the government, why they think that this bill shouldn’t be passed, why they think that the government shouldn’t be covering up for the failures of some providers.

It's possible that we learn that many of them have done everything, taken steps, but Albertans deserve to hear that. Albertans deserve to know that. These families deserve to know that.

The other thing is section 5. "No person is entitled to any compensation or any other remedy or relief for the extinguishment or termination of rights under this Act." The government often even champions the rights of those who are protesting against Alberta's lawful health measures. They talk about their Charter rights, but here they are extinguishing the rights of those who lost loved ones during the pandemic in the facilities that were charged to protect them. They are extinguishing their rights. Instead of standing up for those families, instead of standing up for their rights, they're depriving them of their right to seek justice, to seek answers, to seek closure. Again, the government did not talk to a single family who lost a loved one in these care facilities, not one.

That's the reason I'm supporting this motion that this bill be referred to the committee for further discussion.

3:30

Then in section 8 the government has reserved powers for itself to make regulations and exempt anyone and everyone, whoever they deem fit, from liability. They reserved a *carte blanche* for them in these regulations, and these blanket powers shouldn't be given to a government that is the least trusted on this file or any other file, for that matter, across this country.

It's for these reasons that I strongly support and urge all members of this House that – these families do live in your ridings as well. Don't deprive them of their right to seek answers, to seek closure, to seek justice. This bill is a bad bill. It shouldn't be passed.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. There's an incredible amount of what was said which is completely false, and I'd like to walk folks through what was said that is not correct at all. The member said that – well, you know what he did say that is true? That the health facilities and the health professionals – remember, this is not even just about health facilities, but this is also about our regulated health professionals: our physicians, our nurses, our pharmacists. They are responsible for all Albertans, including for – the NDP does have a continued and particular focus on our long-term care and designated supportive living facilities because they oppose the part of the system which is not provided by AHS. They have a particular focus, when it comes to Bill 70, on those facilities. They are correct that those facilities are responsible for those residents.

But they're not correct when they say that, quote, this is robbing folks of the right to seek answers, robbing of the right to seek justice, that it is taking away the right to sue, that it is depriving the right to seek justice, and that it is extinguishing rights. None of that is true, Madam Speaker.

Let's start with the first one. It is not robbing anybody of the right to seek answers or the right to seek justice. That is totally incorrect, what the member has said. What we are doing is aligning with the NDP government in B.C. as well as governments in Saskatchewan and Ontario in being able to provide for those who make a good-faith effort in complying with the public health measures that have been determined by Dr. Hinshaw and AHS. If you are a regulated health professional or a facility, if you make a good-faith effort, those folks have an added ability for them to have this protection under this bill.

But if somebody is a bad actor, if they didn't make a good-faith effort to comply, yes, the loved ones and the victims of COVID-19, if there was a situation where there was a bad actor who did not make a good-faith effort, can seek answers. Those folks can seek justice. They do have the right to sue. They do have the right to seek justice. They do have rights that are not extinguished. I will point out for the member that unlike Ontario, which actually did extinguish lawsuits – they actually did do that – we decided not to. Because there is only one law firm that is representing the litigation that is currently in place right now, the four lawsuits, the only burden is for that one law firm to be able to amend their statement of claim, to file an amended statement of claim with red underlining and add the word "gross." That's the only burden on that one law firm, Madam Speaker. Nothing has been extinguished, unlike in Ontario.

We are aligning with the NDP government in B.C. except – actually, I'd point out that the scope of this is related to regulated health professionals. It's related to our health facilities, unlike provinces like Ontario, B.C., and Saskatchewan, which had their equivalent legislation apply to all persons. We didn't do that in Alberta. This is for regulated health professionals. Maybe that's a good time to segue into the question I was asked by the hon. member: who did we consult? We consulted with the associations of the regulated health professions: the AMA on behalf of physicians, RxA on behalf of pharmacists. We consulted with our two associations that represent the nurses.

We consulted with, yes, the operators of the health facilities that – the NDP seems to want to use COVID as an opportunity to try to drive them out of being a part of the health system. We know that they oppose independent providers in the health care system, in particular continuing care. They want to leverage COVID to be able to not protect, not help the facilities that make good-faith efforts to be able to comply with the guidelines that were determined by AHS. Remember, AHS, throughout the pandemic, has been continually monitoring these facilities, continually making sure that they're following the guidance of Dr. Hinshaw and AHS to make sure that everybody gets the care that they need throughout the pandemic.

That's what the NDP doesn't want people to hear and doesn't want people to know about, that all these operators and all the regulated health professions within those facilities, within AHS facilities, within long-term care facilities but also in our physicians' offices, within the offices of our pharmacists, who have been able to do amazing work to be able to help us make sure that our vaccine rollout is a – we're leaders in the nation, Madam Speaker, because of their work. The NDP wants to turn our backs on those professionals.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the referral motion on Bill 70 – yeah – and certainly provide some rebuttal to the hon. Health minister as well, who took his five minutes of time to really conflate a lot of issues and to cast aspersions on people, I guess, as a release of frustration, perhaps, you know, to kind of work through other issues that he might bring to this Chamber. We want to stick to the referral on Bill 70 specifically.

I think that it's incumbent upon all of us to make sure that we are dealing directly with a very serious issue that took place over the last 16 months in congregated settings – long-term care facilities, lodge facilities, assisted living facilities – across this province. Really, we saw this extended across the country and in many places

around the world as well. We know that this is where the most fatalities took place, especially in the first waves of COVID in this province and indeed around the world. Here in this province we saw 1,250 people in continuing care facilities lose their lives, many more with serious illness that could debilitate them in quite a profound way, and, of course, many thousands of people living in isolation for extended periods of time, which exacerbated other physical elements that they did experience, different conditions, and then, of course, quite significant psychological impacts on people as well.

I think it's absolutely essential for us to deal head-on with this issue and deal with it in an objective and a compassionate and very – with all the power that we have available through this Chamber. The notion that we should refer this specific bill, I think, to committee is eminently reasonable to make sure that we are building a policy that will get it right in regard to legal obligations that individual facilities have, legal obligations that the government does have as well, and to ensure that there is proper recourse for individuals to investigate, you know, how care was delivered in different circumstances. I think that's the least that we can do, and I think it's important to make sure that we have full transparency around those things, too.

3:40

One of the things that is still very murky, Madam Speaker, in regard to this Bill 70 is how it could apply to other settings as well. I asked the sponsor of the bill about this, and I was getting a very oblique but disturbing answer about how you could use this same principle for meat-packing facilities and other settings where people are working and compelled to work in conditions that could pass on COVID to fellow workers. Again, we need to have much more clarity in regard to what the responsibility is, let's say, for a company that has something like a meat-packing plant to ensure that the standards are in place for safety.

I mean, this is not about suing and litigation and so forth; it's about using that legal tool to make sure that we have the highest standard available for workers, for seniors, and people that are in the very most vulnerable circumstances in our province. That's what it's all about. To suggest that we compromise that ability to use that tool to make those places safer, I think, at the very least deserves a referral to committee to make sure that we are doing the right thing at the right time for those very vulnerable people.

I mentioned it yesterday when I heard the news – and I'll mention it again – that we can look for not just the worst examples and the tragic locus of infection and difficulties, but we can also look for best practices and help to use those as a standard for moving forward, right? I mentioned that yesterday in the news, they were talking about Canterbury Court here in Edmonton, that was able to minimize COVID infections and transfer of infection in their facility by using certain techniques and using best practices, that we could, you know, flip and, instead of looking for the most grossly negligent thing, look to the highest example of a standard that we could achieve to assure that we won't have something like this happen again. I mean, who knows, right?

We know that infection – and this was a monumental and generational opportunity to learn from this pandemic. There are ways by which we can make it stronger and make places safer, quite frankly. One of those tools by which we can do that is to use the legal system to investigate and to refine and to find out exactly what and how different circumstances unfolded. You know, this notion of pulling back in any way people's ability, families' or workers' ability to seek recourse from different situations they might be in: I'm really troubled by that, quite frankly. When we see something

like that happen, then we have to pull that string and make sure it is really the best thing to do. Is it really the right thing to do?

One of the arguments that I've heard over the last few days – and I've heard it actually around this place, this Chamber, for quite a long time – is to say: oh, well, if you don't provide some cushion or some change or protection for legal action, then places, different service providers will just get up and leave. Well, Madam Speaker, I hate to say it, but, I mean, that is the oldest trick in the book, right? For so many, when they don't like legislation – I've heard it many times. I mean, it's a completely different industry but the same argument that owners in the service industry used when we talked about a minimum wage increase. They said: oh, well, I'm afraid we're just going to have to leave and shut our place down because we can't afford this, and we're going to leave. You know what? You have to do the right thing. You don't go with the threats. You don't go with someone threatening to pull away from something. You go for the highest standard, to do the right thing, which includes the highest standard of legal protection, quite frankly. Those things are part and parcel.

We heard it recently as well with insurance companies, with car insurance, right? They said: you know, well, if you don't open this thing up and give us a great big increase and allow us to increase fees, we'll leave, or we'll stop insuring people in Alberta. Well, yeah, maybe; maybe not. Again, this government chose to take that threat and allow Albertans to be gouged on their car insurance, you know? I mean, we don't know what happened. I mean, we can certainly ask. The minister could probably provide some illumination on this issue about how providers reacted and who did they meet with and what kind of information did they get and what did they ask for. Did they ask for increased legal protection from litigation, and who was it that was asking for those things?

I'm pretty sure – again, we don't know because the curtain of secrecy is behind it, but we can ask right now. Did they meet with families and family groups to say: hey, did people from family settings ask if they could have their ability to seek legal recourse for treatment and so forth to reduce that level of protection? I would be curious to know how that went down and whether it did or not. I strongly suggest that it didn't happen at all.

I'm just really curious to know where the government was coming from on this whole notion. Again, you know, I think a lot of this Bill 70 pivots around this whole idea of gross negligence. Are we moving from negligence to gross negligence, and then, again, how much less of a protection or a degree of legal recourse does that leave an individual who would like to investigate that further? Again, it just raises some apprehension, Madam Speaker, because, quite frankly, we're dealing with something that's very important right now. I think that job one, when we move through to the other side of the immediate pandemic crisis, is that we need to get our house in order in regard to long-term care and continuing care and congregated settings like that. We need to make sure that we're protecting the rights of workers in meat-packing plants and other places where people are vulnerable to COVID, and we need to make sure that we're not just trying to create less of a protective legal framework for those individuals as we move along.

I mean, we have the tool of referral as part of the Westminster system in order to have some sober second thought in regard to this, and I really don't think that there's an imminent emergency, right? The legal system works quite well in regard to these issues. I think that, you know, Albertans, when they are in – especially if you have direct contact with someone who is in a continuing care or different setting like that, then they know with stark detail just how life has been in a facility over the last 16 months. People worked really hard. I know that in the facilities that I had in my constituency, the workers were going great guns and doing everything they could to

reduce the likelihood of spread and to keep a sense of community in an isolated setting. But one of the things that was immediately apparent – and I know the minister knows about this, too – was that this notion, because of the low wages that care providers in these facilities make and the lack of stable employment, that people need to look for more than one place in which to work.

Of course, the virus knows no boundaries. If people are allowed to work in more than one facility or have to work in more than one facility to make ends meet, then this creates a pathway for infection, not just with COVID but other infections as well. So these are things that we all need to learn from, and we all need to learn using the full system available to us in regard to using the legislation, using our committee, which I think is a very strong and a fine place to work, using the full powers of our legal system to investigate and to look for those higher standards that we need to achieve in these settings and to make sure that we do what's right for Albertans, especially seniors.

Based on that, I think this referral is eminently reasonable, and I encourage all MLAs to support it. Thank you.

3:50

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciated the thoughts that were being shared by my colleague from Edmonton-North West as he was talking about his concerns with Bill 70 and why it should be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. He referred to the work that he saw so many front-line health care workers doing to protect those they were serving, and it caused me to reflect on the, frankly, ridiculous comments I heard from the Minister of Health as I entered the Chamber this afternoon as he essentially stepped through the looking glass, claiming that somehow it's he and his government that have been working to support and protect front-line health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's incredibly rich to hear that minister make the claim that it is he and his government that have been supporting them and that myself and my colleagues, in criticizing Bill 70 and so many other aspects where this government has utterly botched and failed on its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, are in fact attacking front-line health care workers and not the failures of this minister and his government.

Now, I know the Member for Edmonton-North West: indeed, his partner works in the front-line health care system. I imagine he's had many conversations with her about what she talks about with her colleagues. I'm pretty sure, Madam Speaker, that when it comes to talking about things like Bill 70 and this referral amendment we have in front of us, for a vast majority of front-line health care workers in this province, if you were to ask them who had their back during this pandemic, it is not going to be this minister and this government.

I was wondering if the Member for Edmonton-North West would care to reflect on why the concerns of Bill 70 are not, in fact, about the front-line health care workers, which this government likes to claim it's protecting, but, rather, about the sorts of corporate interests that he was noting earlier.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I have made caution about the use of some of the language or motives. You may have insinuated against the minister as an individual. However, as no point of order has been called, we will proceed.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks. Can I get a time check, Madam Speaker, please?

The Deputy Speaker: You have three minutes.

Mr. Eggen: Three minutes. Okay. Great.

It's very important for us to take two steps back and make sure that we learn the lessons that are there right in front of us in regard to long-term care and assisted living – right? – with 1,250 deaths just here in the province alone and many more thousands across the country, hundreds of thousands around the world in these types of settings. I think that the very first thing that we need to make sure of is that there are standards that are enforceable and enforced using the other branch of jurisdiction, which is the law. I know that most individuals work under a framework, especially being attracted to human care in the most general sense, and, you know, people are there for the very best reasons. But when you have especially corporate, for-profit care, then sometimes the issue gets blurred, quite frankly.

One of the first analyses that I've seen not just across this province but across the country is, you know: how many fatalities were there in for-profit places, in nonprofit places, and in public facilities? We need to make sure that we're looking at those numbers very carefully as a starting point to see where we can make improvements. You can make improvements through policy, you can make improvements through standards for improved working conditions, and you can make improvements using the law. It's as simple as that. Any time the law gets compromised in terms of protecting the individuals that are receiving care, in this case, then that is a cause for concern.

It's been a tough 16 months, as my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre mentioned. I know a lot of health care professionals that are working on the front lines, not just my partner but my sister as well and my eldest daughter. I'm very proud of the work that they do. You see it through their colleagues as well, just how much they care to put out that extra effort to ensure the safety of their patients and their families as well. I want to make sure that I am in this place and all of my colleagues are in this place to have their backs every step of the way as well. There's no . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-North West. It was a little bit of a different tactic than the previous member speaking, and I appreciate that because rather than saying things that were untrue about the bill, what the Member for Edmonton-North West said instead was pointing out that throughout the pandemic many of our health care facilities, including those who are long-term care, he mentioned in particular – I assume that he means also the designated supportive living as well – have been a great focus. Many of the residents have been vulnerable to COVID, and he made a great point, that this is an opportunity for us to be able to look at these facilities, look at the care that's provided in them, and to improve, as he said, improve through better standards, improve through the legislation. I couldn't agree with him more.

Actually, before COVID had hit this province, before it had hit the world, we in 2019 began a review of continuing care, thankfully starting it before COVID had come, and throughout 2020, despite COVID, continued to do that review. We now have that report, and it's really helpful for us to be able to direct us on how we can improve the continuing care system for all Albertans, including the residents and their families. I do appreciate this opportunity to speak to that because there are opportunities for us to be able to have a – and one of the reasons why we started this in 2019, Madam Speaker, is because this is, in particular, one of the areas that is a great example of how the NDP in their four years in government

really let down this part of the health care sector in continuing care, in not trying to improve the health care system during their four years and, in particular, not trying to make the system more focused on patients.

What we did in this review is asked a panel to be able to help us with recommendations on how we can, in particular, turn the facility-based continuing care system into being focused on quality of life and being focused on the residents, being focused on making it centred on patients and to be able to look at new models of care that we see throughout the world and being able to make sure that that's implemented here in Alberta, to make sure that the care that's provided in these facilities is going to be the best care that they can get. That was one of the focuses, and that's one of the major themes of that review. So I agree with Edmonton-North West that this is an opportunity to be able to learn from COVID. That's one of the opportunities that we had with this review, to use COVID to learn and be able to have that focus on these recommendations.

Another one of these themes is the increased monitoring of quality, the increased monitoring of the services – how are the audits and inspections being done, what are the standards that should be met, and what are the enforcement mechanisms that are used in these facilities? – trying to make all those better so that the care that's provided in these facilities for these residents and for their families is going to get better.

We also saw a number of recommendations coming out of this, and one of them was to increase the number of care hours for each of these residents, depending on the level of care that they get, whether it's a DSL or whether it's long-term care, increasing the level of care hours to an amount that they estimate by the year 2030 would be \$500 million more for the government to be able to fund this level of care hours that is being suggested in this report. So this is a government that has gone out seeking recommendations to make the facility-based continuing care system better for those residents, make it focused on patients rather than what the NDP had done during their four years in ignoring that part of the system and not being outcomes focused, not being focused on patients.

4:00

There were also a number of other recommendations that were related to client and resident choice, how the clients, the residents, whether it's home care or whether they're in facility-based continuing care, can direct the funding themselves so that we can allow people who are couples to grow old together, to live together in the same facility, and not separate couples like they were during the entire four years of the NDP, with the NDP refusing to do anything about it during their four years.

Also, allowing people to age in place: this was a focus of ours when we began this review, to make a continuing care system in the province that is allowing people to age in place and not that, when you need an increased or more intensive level of care, you have to leave where you live, go back into a pathway, and find another place to live.

Some of the examples of how we actually are agreeing with the Member for Edmonton-North West: wanting to work in improving the continuing care system, whether it's home care or whether it's facility-based continuing care, so that the residents are getting the best care in the province, which they deserve, but also for their families and to increase some of the opportunities for those who work in these facilities, Madam Speaker.

Now, I want to correct, now that I have the opportunity, some of the misinformation that we did hear, unfortunately. One of the allegations was that there were fewer deaths in publicly owned facility-based continuing care or long-term care, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, the opposite is true, that we did see more deaths

during COVID in our publicly owned long-term care facilities than we did in those that are independently provided.

Remember that the system is about one-third/one-third/one-third, so about a third of our beds are publicly owned and operated through subsidiaries that are owned by AHS, a third of them are corporations, and a third of them, which are also attacked by the NDP, are faith-based groups and nonprofits. It's that two-thirds of the system that the NDP have wanted to leverage COVID to attack, to be able to leverage COVID to no longer have them as part – remember that they're an important part of the continuing care system – of the continuing care system. That's unfortunate, that they wanted to leverage, both provincially and federally, attacking those incredibly important independent providers, and we see it again today with the misinformation that we've heard and the allegation that there have been more deaths in the nonpublic, the independently provided facilities, as opposed to those that are publicly owned.

I should also say that in this review – the Member for Edmonton-North West helpfully pointed it out – throughout COVID a lot of these residents and, as well, their loved ones, because of the public health measures, did not have the same opportunities to be able to interact with other people. A really important thing that we learned with this report is the recommendation that we can increase the mental health supports that are provided in these facilities for those residents and for their loved ones.

Madam Speaker, also, you know, while I compliment the Member for Edmonton-North West for his helpful comments and pivoting from the tactic from the previous speaker, the Member for Calgary-McCall, and that we hear from the intervention from Edmonton-City Centre, let me point out that Bill 70 is not about just continuing care. This is about our regulated health professionals, and we hear from Calgary-McCall and Edmonton-City Centre an attack on Bill 70, which is saying that if you are a regulated health professional and you make a good-faith effort to comply with the public health measures and the guidance provided by whether it's Dr. Hinshaw as the chief medical officer of health or AHS, if you're making a good-faith effort to be able to comply and somebody under your care still contracts COVID, you should still be held responsible for that.

Madam Speaker, again, let me point out that throughout the pandemic the NDP, in particular the Health critic, have said a number of things about this government that have been completely untrue and tried to perpetuate the false narrative that the government is not there behind our health professionals throughout the pandemic. We have made sure that for AHS resources were not an issue and for them to be able to respond to the pandemic, whether it was the contingency plans that the NDP attacked, whether it was the rollout right now, that we see the NDP continually attacking in this House even though we are national leaders in our vaccine rollout strategy.

The NDP want to pretend that they have the backs of our health professionals, but here they're attacking legislation that would have the backs of the regulated health professionals – the nurses, the physicians, the pharmacists – who are in our health facilities, in our hospitals taking care of patients but also part of the rollout of the vaccines. We see the NDP continually being hypocritical, in one stance trying to pretend that they have the backs of our health professionals, but then we see that hypocrisy here today by attacking the very legislation that would say that if you are making a good-faith effort to comply with what Dr. Hinshaw and other MOHs throughout the province have determined to be the best way for us to be able to protect Albertans and protect themselves as health professionals, to protect their colleagues, that's not going to be good enough. That's not going to be good enough for the NDP.

We see again that hypocrisy and the attacks we've seen throughout the last year and a half against AHS, the misinformation that we've seen from the members opposite in trying to create these false narratives about those who are on the front line. AHS has been the most significant contributor to us being able to respond to the pandemic in the testing. You know, they haven't done most of the vaccines – we, thankfully, have our pharmacists, who are helping to get the huge volume and the huge capacity we have right now – but they've been an integral part. They're also the ones that are helping our temporary clinics in being able to reach out to communities where we see not a huge amount of uptake throughout the province. That's AHS doing that, and AHS is asking for this legislation as well as Covenant as well as Lamont health as well as ASCHA as well as the ACCA as well as the AMA as well as RxA.

Now, I've been asked: have I spoken to any family members of those who have been lost to COVID? Madam Speaker, like, I'm assuming, though I don't know, that many of us here in this Chamber know many families who have lost loved ones to COVID. Unfortunately, that's a circumstance that many of us face. Yes, I have spoken to people who have lost a loved one during COVID about Bill 70, about the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's legislation – and I asked for their feedback – about whether I would support it. I appreciated their feedback. I appreciated their candid and guileless feedback.

I think that when people cut through the noise and see the signal from the NDP and see the signal, see what this is actually about, not the misinformation that they're hearing from the NDP but hearing that this is about those who make a good-faith effort not being held liable, then they support that because they've seen all the work that our health facilities and our regulated health professionals have done throughout the pandemic to support Albertans, to protect Albertans. They had our backs; we should have theirs.

The NDP should have theirs as well, and they should do it by supporting Bill 70, by supporting those like the Alberta Medical Association, who believe that the 11,000 physicians that we have throughout the province, whether it's in a health facility or whether it's in their offices if they had to see somebody – now, thankfully, we've had virtual codes, and much of the care that's been provided, whether it's a specialist's office or in a family physician's office, has had the opportunity to be provided virtually, through phone or through videoconferencing.

Sometimes physicians have had to have patients come into their office, and it's meant putting themselves at risk in their own offices or putting themselves at risk when they go into our health facilities. We have physicians, we have nurses, and we have nurse practitioners going into their offices but also into our health facilities and long-term care facilities to look after us, looking after our residents, looking after other health care professionals when they've needed it.

As they've done that, put themselves at risk and put their families at risk, they're asking us to support Calgary-Fish Creek's Bill 70 because, as they've pointed out: we had your back; please have ours. Please support Bill 70 – that is what they've said as these regulated health professionals – so they can have some predictability, so they can have that stability. That's important for us as a government as we support Bill 70 – or, at least, as I support Bill 70, Madam Speaker. I can't speak for everyone in this facility.

4:10

That's what I'm hearing from Albertans. When they cut through the noise of the NDP and see where they've been hearing things that are untrue throughout the last 18 months from the NDP, things that are not true about what the government has done or what the government is doing, and when they find out that the NDP have

been untruthful, they're appreciative, and that includes appreciative of Bill 70 and the work that we've done to make sure that those who are making good-faith efforts should be protected.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to rise under 29(2)(a) for some more points of clarity from the minister. I'll speak on my own behalf first. I think it's important to note that those who are asking for this legislation are asking in good faith and that they are not bad actors. The people asking for this are entire sections of an industry, a field that works to support Albertans in our health care when we're most vulnerable. We're not looking to try and create legislation that will put under 70 per cent of the long-term care spaces delivered by the private sector, because they did their absolute best in what was, understandably, an international pandemic crisis. We are changing the standard so that people can continue to pursue legal action under gross negligence.

Albertans that I speak to want to make sure that we have a health care system that can continue to serve them. That's what all this was about over the last 15 months, making sure that our health care system was protected. That's also what this Bill 70 is about, making sure that good-faith actors, individuals, these regulated health professionals, who worked hard to protect Albertans in the crisis of the pandemic, can continue to do so for many, many years to come and that it's sustainable. I think that is incredibly important to recognize.

I find it disingenuous when members on the opposite benches imply that some are bad actors because they're asking for this legislation. I don't believe that to be true. I believe them to be some of the best Albertans who stepped up. No matter where you came from on this question of COVID, I think that every single constituent in my riding is grateful to have the health care that they do. They want that health care to continue.

I think that if we ask this question in context, we're saying: after a global pandemic, where we had very dramatic public health measures in place, rightfully so, is it reasonable and right for us to protect those good-faith actors who did their job, exactly what we asked them to do, some of whom put themselves on the line, sacrificed personally in many ways, and also at times put their own health at risk to do so? Are we going to be there to make sure they continue to serve Albertans?

It is, I think, unfair for anyone to suggest that this bill is doing anything other than allowing appropriate litigation to continue under the standard of gross negligence and also protecting those good-faith actors so that they can continue to operate and provide health care, especially to those most vulnerable, especially to those in long-term care, especially to those who deserve, after getting through COVID, to have that care there for them. I think that is paramount, in my mind.

I was wondering if the minister would be able to give me more insight in terms of the consequences, especially for long-term care private actors, if this were not to be passed. My constituents want to make sure that that continues on, that they are still there to provide for their needs, especially long term, towards the end of their lives.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the minister could respond.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. That's a fantastic question and fantastic points. This is not, as the members opposite would allege, extinguishing anything, taking away anything. There is still the opportunity for Albertans to be able to commence

litigation or continue with litigation that's already commenced. We didn't proceed, like Ontario did, in extinguishing litigation, and like other provinces, it's the same language. Gross negligence is the same standard that's being used in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and B.C. The NDP government in B.C. is taking the same steps. If anything, the only difference here is that, unlike those provinces, this is focused on the health care sector whereas these other provinces have taken a much wider approach that all persons would be included in their equivalent legislation. That's the difference here. The Member for Peace River is correct that those who are bad actors would not want this, this Bill 70, because this doesn't protect them. If you are a bad actor, if you didn't make good-faith efforts to follow the infection prevention and control measures that were determined throughout COVID under the public health measures . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, according to Government Motion 88 the question must now be put.

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:17 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Jones	Rowswell
Ellis	LaGrange	Sawhney
Getson	Long	Schweitzer
Glasgo	Lovely	Shandro
Glubish	Luan	Singh
Goodridge	Madu	Stephan
Gotfried	McIver	Turton
Guthrie	Neudorf	Walker
Horner	Orr	Williams
Hunter	Pon	Wilson
Issik	Rosin	Yaseen

Against the motion:

Bilous	Goehring	Shepherd
Deol	Sabir	Sweet
Eggen		

Totals:	For – 33	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 70 read a second time]

Government Motions

(continued)

Vacant Senate Seats

85. Mr. Kenney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Prime Minister to respect the democratic voices of Albertans and refrain from filling Alberta's two vacant Senate seats until Albertans have an opportunity to elect nominees for appointment to the Senate on October 18, 2021, and further urge the Prime Minister to commit to filling the two vacant Senate seats with those individuals who received the highest number of votes in that Senate election.

[Adjourned debate June 15: Mr. Schow]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate on Government Motion 85?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 85 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:36 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Jones	Sawhney
Amery	LaGrange	Schweitzer
Ellis	Long	Shandro
Getson	Lovely	Singh
Glasgo	Luan	Stephan
Glubish	Madu	Turton
Goodridge	McIver	Walker
Gotfried	Neudorf	Williams
Guthrie	Orr	Wilson
Horner	Pon	Yao
Hunter	Rosin	Yaseen
Issik	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Bilous	Goehring	Shepherd
Deol	Sabir	Sweet
Eggen		

Totals:	For – 35	Against – 7
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[Government Motion 85 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 52

Recall Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pride to rise before the floor of this Assembly to move third reading of Bill 52, the Recall Act.

Madam Speaker, Albertans put a lot of faith in their elected leaders, and elected representatives have a great responsibility to the very Albertans who elected them. This is why it is incredibly important that anyone elected to office is held accountable if they fail to live up to their duties between elections. Bill 52 would help strengthen democracy by providing a tool to hold elected officials accountable throughout their term and not just at election time. Our government campaigned on delivering voter recall for Albertans, and this is yet another promise made, another promise kept.

In the fall of 2020 the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee held public meetings and accepted written submissions about this legislation. This all-party committee found that Albertans from all backgrounds were very supportive of the government pursuing recall legislation. The Recall Act would allow Albertans to start a reasonable process that could lead to removing and replacing elected officials at all levels of government before the end of their term. This includes MLAs, mayors, and other elected municipal officials and school trustees.

Any time between 18 months after an election to six months before an election an Albertan could begin the process to have an MLA recalled. If an Albertan feels that the MLA in their

constituency is not upholding their responsibilities, they can apply to the Chief Electoral Officer for a petition to recall them. There will be a fee, but it has not been set yet and will appear in the regulations. The Albertan would then have 60 days to gather signatures from 40 per cent of eligible voters in that constituency. They would then submit the petition to the Chief Electoral Officer, who would ensure that the signatures are valid and that the petition reached the 40 per cent threshold. If the recall petition is successful, a recall vote would then be held in that constituency to determine if the elected official should be recalled. If the recall vote is successful, the elected official will be removed, and a by-election will be held to fill the vacant MLA seat.

The process is slightly different to recall municipal officials and school trustees. To recall an elected official in their municipality, an Albertan would pay a \$500 fee to initiate a petition through their municipality's chief administrative officer. They would then have 60 days to gather signatures from eligible voters that represent 40 per cent of the population of that municipality or ward. The Albertan would then submit the signatures to the chief administrative officer in their municipality, who would ensure that the signatures are valid and that the petition reached the 40 per cent threshold. If the recall petition is successful, the chief administrative officer will make a declaration at the next council meeting, at which time the official will be removed.

If an Albertan feels that an elected official in their school division is not upholding their responsibilities, they can apply to the secretary of the school board for a recall application and pay a \$500 fee. Madam Speaker, the petitioner would then have 120 days to gather signatures from eligible voters that represent 40 per cent of eligible voters in that school district. If the recall petition is successful, the official is removed, and the board would then decide if a by-election is necessary at that point in time.

Now, keep in mind that there needs to be some stringency and rigour around recall legislation to prevent abuse while ensuring that elected officials remain accountable. This is why we are proposing a two-step process for recalling MLAs, a recall petition and then a recall vote. As I noted earlier, Madam Speaker, this is to make sure that 40 per cent of voters in the entire constituency agree that there should even be a recall vote, an important question worthy of a petition. In fact, in B.C., the only other Canadian province that has recall legislation, Elections BC recommended the same process as the one we are proposing in this Bill 52.

5:00

Now, Madam Speaker, the NDP has done a lot of whinging and blithering on recall this session. They have flip-flopped more than a fish out of water, but that's just typical noise from an easily agitated NDP, that reflexively disagrees with anything this government has done even when it clearly reflects the will of the same people that elected them.

Madam Speaker, I want to address some points made by some of my independent colleagues in this Chamber, who have expressed criticism from a good-faith – I must add: from a good-faith – perspective. The government's recall bill is aligned with the commitment made in the United Conservative electoral platform, a platform which specifically named British Columbia's recall provision as a parallel. Both independent MLAs ran under this explicit platform, upon which they were elected. Our recall provisions are also in line with the previous private member's bill introduced by the very party they belonged to at the time. Lastly, a special all-party legislative committee was established to provide recommendations for recall and citizen-initiated legislation. All Albertans, including MLAs, were free to make submissions to the committee. Regrettably, neither of those independent MLAs made

recommendations to the committee despite their supposed interest in this particular issue.

Madam Speaker, our government was elected on a promise to deliver Albertans a greater say in their democratic system and to be able to hold elected officials accountable between elections. As I have said, this legislation would allow them to do this throughout their officials' term. Albertans are now in the driver's seat of their democracy. As elected officials we serve at the pleasure of the voters. We cannot forget this. Recall increases the power that voters have over their representatives. This legislation is part of our larger democratic reform package, that will provide Alberta citizens with a greater say in their democratic process. This is another promise made, another promise kept.

With that, Madam Speaker, I urge all members to support this very important legislation, and I move third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for recognizing me so I can speak to third reading of Bill 52, Recall Act. Over the different stages of this bill the minister would like to say that we've been inconsistent, but that's not the case. I sat on the committee that reviewed this very piece of legislation. There were recommendations made that would actually make this piece of legislation valid, I guess, would be the word, in the sense that there was a recognition made by experts, submissions that were made around the threshold of this bill, around how feasible it would be to actually be implemented. You know, the minister just highlighted one of the fundamental issues here, and that is the fact that many of the pieces of this legislation are still unknown because they're going to be done in regulation.

One of those pieces is, as the minister just said, the fee that individuals are going to have to pay to even start this recall process. Now, knowing how the government doesn't actually want to make this legislation work, knowing that the way that it's been structured would never work in the sense of recalling an MLA, I could easily see – and I guess we'll see in the future, but I would think, looking at just the fee being set in regulation alone, that the fee could be set so high that a member of the public wouldn't be able to afford to even start the process. How do we know? We don't know because it's in regulation. Because we see this piece of legislation being written the way that it's written, it does bring up: well, why not just create one more barrier to make it even harder to recall an elected official? That's what this legislation does.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The government will say that this is a promise made. Sure. The promise was made in the platform. What was also made in the platform was a commitment to create jobs, to deal with the economy, and to look at pipelines. None of that has happened. In fact, if we want to look at what we've dealt with within legislation within this Chamber just today: Lobbyists Act, search committees, Senate, and then Bill 70 around COVID. Nothing to do with jobs. We actually haven't seen a piece of legislation in this Chamber this whole session that has found a way to support Albertans in getting back to work, that has ensured that they have financial security when it comes to COVID-19, where they know that if they are ill, they're going to be able to pay their bills.

In fact, we saw a plan come forward by this government, that they call their jobs now plan, that has created no jobs and, in fact, is the no jobs plan because it actually completely ignored the financial contribution being made by the federal government and missed the very deadline to be able to partner with the federal government

when it came to financial plans around creating employment opportunities for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, what happens with this government is that they're so focused on trying to feed into their base around some of these little niche issues like recall legislation, Senate votes, citizens' initiatives that they're actually just forgetting the majority of Albertans.

That's fine. The government doesn't need to listen. We know they're not. We know they're not listening on coal. We know they're not listening to farmers and ranchers in the south. We know they're not listening to municipalities when it comes to property taxes and trying to get financial compensation for abandoned oil wells and access to service rates, all of those things.

The government will say: "Well, you don't like what we're doing? We're going to be democratic. We're going to introduce recall legislation, but we're going to make it so hard that you'll never actually be able to use it." The way that we know that – you know, going back again to the minister's comments about, "Well, the opposition doesn't like this, doesn't want to support it," we brought forward relatively reasonable amendments to this legislation. One of those amendments was that – the 40 per cent threshold that is required to actually be able to qualify for recall of an MLA, we know, is too high. It was told to us in committee that it was too high and that that threshold actually never works.

But what we also know is that 25 per cent, which was what was proposed as an amendment, does. How do we know that? Well, we've seen it in the state of Wisconsin, where it was a 25 per cent recall in 2012. We saw in Michigan state in 2011 a 25 per cent threshold; another representative was recalled. Again in 2011, Arizona Senate: also a 25 per cent threshold; the member was recalled. So we know that 25 per cent works. There's actual evidence to say that.

But, again, the government doesn't want to have a piece of legislation that actually works. What they want to be able to do is go back to their base and say: look, we did it; we said we would; we did it. Of course, they're not going to explain that they created a system that's so convoluted and that actually, with all of the timelines around – it can't be used until 18 months after the election and then six months before the next election, and, oh, by the way, if you get your signatures and you pay the unknown fee as of today, you still have a period of time to collect those signatures. By the time it all adds up, you're about six months, maybe, within a term where it could potentially be used. Then I'm sure that in regulation there'll be some rule that says: well, actually, that six months doesn't count anymore either. The reality of it is that nobody trusts this government when it comes to these pieces of legislation because every single one that we've seen has been written in a way that actually does not benefit Albertans but benefits the government. It's a problem. It's a clear problem.

You know, I've heard recently, as of even today, the government trying to heckle across the floor about, "Oh, so much for democracy" because we don't vote in favour of pieces of legislation that they put on the floor, as if democracy means that it has to be a hundred per cent agreement, that people aren't allowed to disagree and vote in different ways on issues. That is actually what democracy is. When I see the members opposite say, "Oh, so much for democracy" when the opposition stands up and takes a stand and says, "No, actually, we don't agree with this," that's a problem. When I see members within this Chamber who don't want to respect the parliamentary practices that exist in this Chamber and try to make comments when people are trying to vote, that is a problem. That actually goes against democracy. There are repeated indications of that happening in this very Chamber.

5:10

You know, the government can stand and talk about democracy and how they think the opposition isn't, but what I would really like the members to do, since I have an opportunity to stand and we're talking about behaviour and recall, is that – there is precedent in this place, that seems to have been forgotten, about how we treat each other, about how every member in this Chamber has a right to an opinion and a right to stand and voice that opinion and has a right to vote, whether it's for or against an issue, and that would be the same around recall. That would be the same around a Senate vote, around a municipal vote, any of those things. People have a right to go and cast their ballot. We do it far more openly here. Obviously, we have recorded votes. I own the way that I vote, and I'm fine with that.

What I disagree with is when the government tries to say that unless you agree with us, you are undemocratic, as if democracy must be a hundred per cent all the time and the only way it's democratic is if you agree with the government. I won't support this piece of legislation. Clearly, I'm going to put it on the record right now. Call me undemocratic because I'm saying that I don't support it.

The reality is that I don't support it because it doesn't work. We have provided evidence – the opposition has, the independent members have – to say that the way this bill is written is flawed. There is no ability for it to work. There have been recommendations made to make it better. There have been amendments provided to this government in other stages of this bill that would have made it better, that would have made it actually something that could be used by Albertans to use their voices. But it's been drafted in a way where the reality of it is that even if an Albertan tried to use it, they would never meet the threshold, and it was designed that way on purpose. It was designed by this government to perceive that they believe in democracy yet make the threshold so high that it's unachievable. That is the problem.

I will encourage my members in the opposition to not vote in favour of this piece of legislation. The government can choose to try to say: that's not democracy. The reality of it is that this piece of legislation isn't. If the government really wanted it to be democratic, if the government really wanted to make sure that Albertans had a right to use their voices to recall MLAs – I feel like there are probably quite a few that are on a list right now for recall – then the legislation would allow that to happen. But the government refused to fix it. They refused to take recommendations that would make the threshold 25 per cent. Instead, they made it in a way where fees are being hidden in regulation, fundraising is being hidden in regulation so nobody actually knows what the full effect of this legislation is going to be, and refused to take expert advice which said: a 40 per cent threshold for eligible voters in a constituency is too high; it should be 25 per cent. It didn't happen.

So I will stand here, use my voice in democracy, as I have a right to do, and vote against it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, on the main bill – it's not under 29(2)(a) as the member was the second speaker. If you'd like to be on the main bill, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Manning in her desire to be democratic and her concerns that because the thresholds are too high, this is an undemocratic bill. That's the part where I get stumped. It seems to me that, yes, we need to have a threshold somewhere. We want to make it beyond abuse, so it's not frivolous attempts but sincere, honest attempts for voters to be able to use recall.

But if the concern is that the threshold is too high or we should have a different voters list, what you're doing is removing any ability for any recall by voting against this. If your desire is for it not to pass, then it seems like you really are undemocratic in your desire, in the members opposite. If the goal was to say, "We need something better, but this at least introduces some democratic element," I would expect opposition members to say, "Yes, I'll take the lesser of the two options," in their opinion, and take that.

Now, for my own part, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the thresholds are accurate and that they're appropriately adjusted to not be abused, but I would encourage every member opposite, including the Member for Edmonton-Manning, to consider: if the desire is to be democratic, if the desire is to introduce at least some ability of accountability, then vote yes for this or else you will be labelled undemocratic. It's not that we're being unfair; it's that we're articulately describing the situation: you're voting against any possibility for recall.

Consider for a minute, Mr. Speaker, the argument being posited. We're for democracy, we want accountability, we think the thresholds are too high, so we're voting against any ability for recall. The last one really confuses me. Then on top of that they say: don't call us undemocratic; don't do it; we're just using our vote to not allow democracy, direct democracy in action, for recall. Now, members on this side of the House will stand and say yes for at least some ability, that there will be the possibility of recall.

Now, we don't want recall in every situation at all times. I think every member of this House agrees that we have to have a functioning government, functioning elected office, where frivolous attempts – the bar is set appropriately. But if the members are concerned – and I implore the independent members also to consider this: vote for the legislation even if you believe there should be amendments. Once the legislation is on the books, there's a possibility for future legislators to come back and say: we will refine; we will continue to fix. That's 90 per cent of the legislation that we do in this House, Mr. Speaker. We take existing bills, and we amend, and we fine-tune, and we fix.

If members truly feel that way, this is my pitch. Be democratic, use your voice, vote for the legislation; else, stand by your votes, and stand by the consequences, which will be average-day Albertans and members in this House on the government side saying: to oppose this is to oppose direct democratic action for recall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to respond to the comments from the Member for Peace River. Now, I hope he also understands the democratic system that we're part of in that a majority of government members – and this government certainly has a majority, and it certainly seems that the majority of government members are going to vote in favour of this legislation. Then the legislation will pass.

For the opposition member it is also a functioning part of this democracy to choose to oppose a piece of legislation on a point of principle and, in fact, not be blocking that legislation from taking place. This is something that we have seen folks in conservative parties and progressive parties and folks on all sides of the aisle do at many different points.

I think my colleague for Edmonton-Manning was quite clear about her position on this as a point of principle in that she does not wish to be on the record as supporting the government in putting forward a piece of legislation that does not, in our view, effectively

do what it said it was going to do and helping them continue to perpetrate that illusion on behalf of the people of Alberta. That is a democratic position to take on behalf of her constituents, and it is one that I personally share.

The Member for Peace River can certainly take whatever view he wants on this, but I profoundly disagree that we are in any way blocking democracy or are somehow not engaging in the system as it was intended to function. He can choose to interpret this and indeed he can choose to represent this however he wishes, just as he can choose to represent this legislation actually achieving something which it does not achieve. It's fulfilling a promise that, in our view, it effectively does not in fact meet, a promise that it does not actually fulfill, a choice to do so in name but not actually, really fulfill the spirit of what that promise was. So I will join my colleague from Edmonton-Manning in taking a principled and democratic stand against that legislation.

Thank you.

5:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the Member for Edmonton-City Centre: I would take issue with his characterization that voting for this legislation is a vote for the government. No. It is a vote for the words on the page in the law that is passed, and that is each of our obligations here, to consider the content being passed. Where it's a money bill and a question of confidence, as the member opposite knows, it would be a vote for the government and its legitimacy. I understand when members opposite vote against confidence issues on principle.

But if your stand – and this might be some of the problem, Mr. Speaker, in our Chamber – is that you have nothing but a theatrical display of opposition with no regard for the content being passed and, on principle, members opposite will vote against, no matter the content, because it's the government bringing it forward, then that, I believe, is shirking the responsibility that Albertans sent us here to do. Our obligation is to the legislation that we pass. The content in Bill 52 is what needs to be debated, not who moved it, not whether it's a government bill. The Member for Edmonton-Manning has an obligation, as each of us do here, to consider the legislation on its merits, not on the mover's.

The question here is not whether or not it would be seen to be supporting the government. This is not a money bill and not a question of confidence in the government. It is a question of confidence on whether or not they believe that democratically we should be allowed to recall members. The threshold is too high or too low: fair enough; I understand the debate and the motions put forward to amend it.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, the bill as it stands now in third reading is not changed. We have gone through Committee of the Whole. This Assembly has voted on its content. Now is the approval in third reading of whether or not this content should be passed, whether it should be something available to the people of Alberta, and voting against it in its form in third reading is a vote against its contents. Its contents are the ability to recall members at an appropriate threshold. I invite the member opposite to respond to the question that I'm asking him. Will he or will he not and will he or will he not encourage his colleagues to vote for the content of this legislation if they, in fact, are in principle supporting democratic action?

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none – sorry. Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, are you hoping for 29(2)(a) here or – okay.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-McCall should he choose to still use it.

Mr. Barnes: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to be on the main bill. Is that your understanding?

The Speaker: Correct.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, sir. I'm pleased to rise today in support of this legislation. Mr. Speaker, it's especially in support of thousands and thousands of Albertans, thousands and thousands of UCP members and Conservatives that have told me that this is what they want; not this bill specifically. I'm going to go into a bit on how a government that has talked so much about promises made, promises kept – in my opinion, the opinion of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and thousands of Albertans, this is a case of promise made, just a little, little bit of the promise kept. Once again this government is not meeting the expectations that they themselves helped to set, that Albertans expect.

Mr. Speaker, let's start there. I'm so grateful to represent Cypress-Medicine Hat for three terms, since spring of 2012. In 2011 in Cypress-Medicine Hat, when the desire for the change of a government that had grown to be entitled, wasteful, full of cronyism had peaked, there was also a strong, strong desire for more accountability, more direct democratic involvement for Cypress-Medicine Hatters. I was grateful to have lots of volunteers and lots of energy and lots of time, and we knocked on lots of doors. We had tens and tens of town halls. It's not part of my constituency, the Cypress-Medicine Hat constituency, anymore, but, you know, I'll never forget getting 24 out of 26 people out at Aden or full town halls at Bow Island or Redcliff, another great place, where Albertans came out and told me how much they had felt that their MLAs, their Premier, their government had not listened to them and how much they wanted change. They desperately wanted recall. They wanted something that worked.

A lot of them wanted to talk about term limits. You may remember Premier Prentice suggesting that idea in his 2015 campaign. They wanted some direct democracy, but they wanted something that worked.

Mr. Speaker, so I'm here in 2012: I'm elected, I'm learning the ropes, lots of great people. Then, bang, we had the floor crossings, again, of late 2014. Was the call for, the desire for recall ever huge again then. Albertans were just dumbfounded, bewildered, upset, and wanted to be more involved in the future of their province, wanted to be more involved in making sure that we were free, we were prosperous, and especially that we were leaving the campground better for our children. It was an interesting time, almost back to the 2011-2012 period, where Albertans wanted to be involved.

I feel that we're there again. We've all struggled. We've all worked hard, you know, through the COVID restrictions and regulations. Cypress-Medicine Hat has had a mental health, a spiritual health, a physical health, and now an economic problem as big as the COVID problem, and it breaks my heart when I talk to my colleagues in this room. Unfortunately, Cypress-Medicine Hat isn't the only area where that's happening. It may be all through Alberta. I believe it is.

And, again, Mr. Speaker, what I'm hearing is that Albertans want to be involved in their government. The 4.4 million Albertans that the 87 of us are lucky enough to represent, the ones that we're paid to speak on their behalf, want a greater say, and they want some accountability. We saw that just three or four weeks ago, when my position changed, and now as an independent – there was a lot of outcry, a lot of talk, and again Albertans want to be involved more than voting once every four years.

Let's switch gears a bit, and let's talk about how this UCP government has once again missed the mark. In two years it's incredible how they just can never seem to meet expectations. Let's

start there. I heard, I think, the hon. Minister of Justice talking about how this met what members' policy and that kind of thing was. Well, a quick look at the election platform doesn't show any details as to what was supposed to be in the recall bill. Mr. Speaker, that makes me immediately default to what UCP members said at the November 2020 AGM, policy 19: they wanted a much more achievable bar than what this government just put into legislation. Now, that doesn't mean that the whole legislation is not having some merit, but again it's an example of where they're only fulfilling a small, small part of their promise, not meeting expectations. It makes you wonder why they want to take that back to their members and Albertans, but they do.

This government has had a chance to meet expectations. A private member's bill put forward by, I believe, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon died on the Order Paper last time. We didn't even have a chance to have this kind of discussion, a bill that could have been taken by the government, could have been put forward. We could have had more accountability, more involvement for Albertans six or 12 months ago, but again this UCP government failed to meet expectations. And you wonder why.

Maybe the one that surprises me the most is this confirmation vote, this vote to actually ascertain the recall, this vote only for MLAs where if 40 per cent of the electorate decides to sign the recall petition, then within six months there's another vote. We outlined, of course, in this Assembly how the whole process can take up to 32 or 33 months to happen. Nowhere – nowhere – in the UCP policy, in the members' select policy, as I mentioned, this policy 19 from just seven or eight months ago, in November, and, to my knowledge, nowhere in my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Devon's bill does it say that they want another step of one extra confirmation vote, one extra double check vote, one costly process that will force Albertans to sign a petition, go to the poll, then go to the polls again for the actual recall vote, the by-election, making Albertans wonder about each step along the way and how serious this government is about meeting their promises.

5:30

You know, Mr. Speaker, we talked about it in here quite a bit. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation I think has a very, very similar stance on this as I do. Thank goodness, we're getting some recall, but as they came out in their op-ed, I believe, in the Calgary *Sun*, asking for lower thresholds, not putting another level of confirmation vote in there for MLAs, asking for longer time periods rather than just 60 days to get the signatures – again, relatively grateful to see some kind of recall for Alberta citizens, but again this government totally – totally – didn't meet expectations.

I'm still bewildered at the citizens' committee stuff. My job as an MLA is to do what we're just doing, paying attention to what's happening in here, adding to the debate where we think it's important to our 48,000 constituents. I believe that no MLAs had a response, at least a written response, to these committees, and why would I want to take away time from 4.4 million Albertans who have the opportunity finally to go talk to the ministers, to talk to the government to say what they want? This is my opportunity to do it. Mr. Speaker, it's up to the government to listen. Committee of the Whole is when the 87 of us get to stand up, get to exchange good ideas, and we're on the record.

You know, hats off to the incredible people at *Hansard* for the work they do and how they make things so easy, but the accountability that that provides for us and for our constituents, for anybody, to be able to access any word, any time is also amazing. Mr. Speaker, when Albertans look back on this one, they'll see that in spite of my words, words from another independent MLA, words from the Official Opposition, this government didn't meet

expectations. This government only met a small, small part of their promise, and this government wasn't listening.

Having said all that, I will be voting in support. Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to all for the fulsome debate that's been taking place here. Thank you to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for speaking to this. I'm very happy that the independent member is going to be voting in favour of it. One of the things that we have to consider here is continuous improvement. I believe that the Member for Peace River had hit on that. The understanding that I have with this legislation is that it's not going to get what everybody wants. *You Can't Always Get What You Want*, as that famous song goes from some fellers across the pond from the U.K., so famously.

When you have the electorate put you in place, there are the folks that show up to vote for you, there are the folks that show up to vote against you, and there are the folks that never voted at all. My understanding of the thresholds, again, through the committee that looked at this and other crossjurisdictional analysis, is that I think it's representative of that. Even though I have 40,000, 50,000 constituents in my area, not all of them showed up to vote, but I still have to represent them as an MLA. I have to represent the folks that didn't vote for me.

If the thresholds are too low, then you potentially have a massive swing of one cut or one position that isn't necessarily representative of the constituency. That's how I rationalize it, Mr. Speaker, for myself when you start looking at these thresholds. The timelines I think I spoke of in the wee hours one night. Again, I jumped up off the seat here, representing my constituents, doing that off the cuff. Sixty days might be once you actually start the shot clock. It's no different than being on the basketball court. When you're going out there, you've got so much time to do it. But, like the basketball court, you get all the time to do all that practice that's not on the court at the time of the game.

Again, if I were to put something in place – let's just run through that scenario – if I were to want something as a recall, guaranteed that I would be networking and lobbying and doing all those things in advance of the shot clock being started. You'd already start planting those seeds to do it. Again, once you declare that you're in that game, there's the game, the start of the buzzer to the end of the game, but that doesn't mean that you're not doing everything in advance of the game when you actually execute. That was part of it there.

As far as talking about policies and the AGM, again, I'm new to this. I haven't been elected three or four times before like some members in here. I'm new to politics. But from my understanding of the AGM, there's a difference with what happens in the party, and there's a difference with what happens in government. If you're fortunate enough to be elected and form government, again, you have to represent everyone. It can't just be for your specific party.

To put it into context, if you want to go back to an AGM, the first one that I listened to online here had about 1,400 members that were there developing policy from each of the constituency associations. Fourteen hundred people in the province cannot dictate for 4.2 million people. It's a very scary and precarious situation when you start to look at it in that consequence. Again, understanding that a group, a party believes in a certain amount or threshold, but you have to take that in a broader consideration, in the context. And that's what the committee did. The committee did, again, a crossjurisdictional analysis, looked at what could be implemented and what would take place. Again, there's where the slippery slope comes in with direct democracy and some of those other kernels of it. As elected representatives we're not just for the people that voted for us or just happened to pay the 10 bucks to join the party. This is

consequential to everybody else down the road. Those are some points on that that I would like to make.

The other idea is the continuous improvement. The Member for Peace River had said – and, you know, we get into trouble sometimes when it comes to red tape when you have compounding laws over time that don't get revised, or they do get revised but are less consequential. But you've got to start from somewhere. Any thing, any project, any system I've ever worked on has that idea of continuous improvement. You implement it, put it in place, monitor, control, go back. If it needs to be adjusted, great. Go back and control and adjust, and then see how it affects something else. That's proper management. To have big swings, big changes, and everything else: holy cow. The whole idea behind the bureaucracy: it might be as frustrating as all get out for most of us coming in here because you have an expiry date. As soon as you come in here, you've got a clock ticking like that game. By the time you're going to be on the shelf, you're gone. The bureaucracy lives on. Thank goodness, it's a little slow and cumbersome at times, as frustrating as it is, because it allows for continuity between administrations. It might have taken us two years to unravel some of the things the members opposite put in place of what they wanted, which took them four years, but at least it balances out here towards the end. Again, I believe that's representative.

If you have such a low threshold that everyone was going to an election, I would hearken you to look back in history, back to Germany in the '20s and the '30s and see how that outcome came. You have to let people govern. We do not have a small state where it's direct democracy.

I believe I'll be voting in favour of this. Thank you.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, that concludes the time allotted for Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Are there any others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to speak to this bill and give my support for the bill. I'll be voting in favour of this bill going forward although I do say that I think the bill could have been a little better. I think it could have been a little more representative of our member-passed policies. Some of those ways, of course, is that the percentage of signatures required could have been more in line with the member-passed policies. Also, nowhere in the member-passed policies did it talk about the vote to have a vote.

Now, there's been some suggestion that this aligns perfectly with our commitment during the campaign. I want to read exactly what it says in the campaign platform. It says, "Introduce a Recall Act based on precedents in several jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and in British Columbia where the provision has existed since 1996." When we look at that campaign commitment, we know that – when we look at the B.C. regulations, for instance, we know that to have a vote, this double system of, you know, collecting signatures and then voting to accept the signatures and then having the recall vote after that, is something that isn't in B.C. It isn't in the United Kingdom. It isn't in, say, for instance, California. This is something where it doesn't quite align with what our campaign commitment was.

Again, I support this bill. I want to see this bill succeed. I would love to see some changes down the road with it. But I think this is – we just need to be clear. There have been some accusations that this is following identical to what the campaign platform was. The campaign platform didn't identify numbers or percentages, but it did say that it would follow these other jurisdictions, and none of these jurisdictions have the vote to have a vote. Obviously, this extra vote: it adds time to the whole process, it adds cost to the whole process, and it adds red tape to the whole process.

5:40

Now, we did have a discussion here about this member-passed policy, and there are about 1,400 people, over a thousand people, whatever, at our convention, but when we compare that to who submitted to the committee, there were only maybe 20 or so people that presented to the committee. When we look at where we get the most representation and the most input, I think that the members provided a greater amount of input based on numbers, and I think this received over 70 per cent, almost 75 per cent of the vote of the members. I think, again, as much as I agree that we need to pass this bill and I think it's important and I do believe that it follows, to a certain extent, the campaign platform – and that's great; I think that's fantastic – I think we need to realize that some of the details weren't in the campaign platform, and the details that were in the campaign platform went to jurisdictions that had substantially different rules than what was brought forward here with this one.

I think we need to be able to go through this bill. We need to be able to look at it, I think, from a perspective of trying to make it better, trying to make it more effective. Again, I think we've missed some of the marks there, but I think we have to continue to support this bill, to get it passed in this Legislature, and hopefully we can improve it as time goes on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or a comment for the Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Seeing none, are there others?

If there are none, I am prepared to ask the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to close debate. The hon. minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank all members of the Assembly who have contributed to the debate on Bill 52. This is a historic day for the people of Alberta. Finally, we are giving them what they have always asked of their politicians, of their elected leaders, the power and the tool to be able to hold their elected officials to account. That is the commitment that we made in our platform commitment. That is the commitment that the Premier made in this Assembly. That is what we have told Albertans that we would deliver, and I am exceedingly proud that today we are delivering on that particular promise to finally give Albertans, you know, the power to hold their elected officials to account.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing that the NDP, the New Democratic Party – the word “democratic” is right there in their name – have nothing to do with the meaning of that particular word when it comes to their actions. Earlier today the members opposite voted against Alberta having to conduct Senate elections in our province, an election where the people of Alberta would have the opportunity to determine who goes to the red Chamber to represent them. The NDP said, “Nope; we won't do it,” yet they sit here and they want us to believe that the people of Alberta have not seen through their hypocrisy. They do. [interjections] Just like Albertans saw their hypocrisy in 2019, I am confident that they will see that again in 2023 despite all of this excitement from the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the NDP also voted against referendums. They voted against efforts to make sure that we give more power, that we yield more power to the people to determine their own future and their own fate. They voted against that.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the Leader of the Official Opposition in her response to this particular bill on May 27, 2021, said, and I quote: recall sounds good in theory, but it actually can be a very disruptive and exploitative process. That is all you need to know about the members opposite. Right there from their leader. They have no interest whatsoever . . .

Mr. Sabir: Put in a coming-into-force date.

Mr. Madu: I can see the Member for Calgary-McCall heckling because it is getting at him so bad.

Mr. Speaker, you know, that is all you need to know about the NDP when it comes to giving the power to the people. [interjections] Oh, they say – all of a sudden the threshold becomes an important issue for them when, in fact, philosophically they do not believe in anything close to recall.

Mr. Sabir: It's fake.

Mr. Madu: Fake NDP. Very hypocritical, something that we have become accustomed to in this Chamber.

You know, Mr. Speaker, they also voted against citizen initiatives. Issue after issue that would cede more electoral power to the people, they voted against them.

The Member for Edmonton-Manning, Mr. Speaker, was more concerned about wealthy donors having to endlessly rerun democratic elections until they get the results they want. That's the member, you know, responsible for democratic accountability within the NDP caucus. How interesting. It's not so much about the people being able to determine their own fate; it's about wealthy donors endlessly having to rerun democratic elections until they get what they are looking for. What are they scared of? They are scared any time there is talk of Albertans coming out to vote en masse. That is their concern.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lethbridge-West: recall is just a way to get corporate and PAC money into politics. That is a political party that amended election laws in this province but left a loophole that funnelled tens of millions of dollars from the Alberta Federation of Labour to the NDP and their allies for electoral purposes in this province. They left that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, on this particular bill I am so proud – I am so proud – of my colleagues on this side of the aisle to have delivered on a commitment we made to Albertans to put in place a recall act.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I close debate.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:49 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Horner	Pon
Amery	Hunter	Rowswell
Barnes	Issik	Sabir
Bilous	Jones	Sawhney
Deol	Kenney	Schweitzer
Eggen	LaGrange	Singh
Ellis	Loewen	Stephan
Getson	Long	Turton
Glasgo	Lovely	Walker
Glubish	Luan	Williams
Goehring	Madu	Wilson
Goodridge	McIver	Yao
Guthrie	Orr	Yaseen

Totals: For – 39 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 52 read a third time]

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:09 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	5523
Members' Statements	
Premier's Leadership	5523
Elder Abuse	5523
High School Graduation 2021	5523
University of Alberta Funding.....	5524
Air Tour 2021	5524
Rural Concerns	5524
Oil and Gas Industries and Policies.....	5524
Polish-Canadian Heritage Day Act.....	5525
Provincial Reopening in Brooks-Medicine Hat.....	5525
Notices of Motions	5525
Oral Question Period	
Keystone XL Pipeline Provincial Equity.....	5526
University of Alberta Funding.....	5526
COVID-19 Related Measures Act	5527
Antiracism and Multiculturalism Policies	5527
Senate Elections and Appointments	5528
Coal Development Policy Consultation.....	5528
Oldman River Basin Water Allocation.....	5529
Legislature Grounds and Public Infrastructure	5529
Accessibility in Legislature and Government Services	5530
Police and Crime Prevention	5531
Technology Industry and Economic Diversification	5531
Queen Elizabeth II Highway, 65th Avenue Interchange in Leduc.....	5532
Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood Constituency Concerns.....	5532
Public Lands and Campgrounds	5533
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 220 Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021	5534
Tabling Returns and Reports	5534
Orders of the Day	5535
Government Motions	
Time Allocation on Bill 70.....	5535
Vacant Senate Seats.....	5542
Division	5542
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 70 COVID-19 Related Measures Act.....	5536
Division	5542
Third Reading	
Bill 52 Recall Act.....	5542
Division	5548

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