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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, October 26, 2021

Day 118

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 26, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 73 Infrastructure Accountability Act

[Adjourned debate October 26: Mr. Neudorf]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has approximately 11 minutes remaining should he choose to use it. I see he is rising. The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand today and speak to Bill 73. If passed, the Infrastructure Accountability Act legislates the release of a 20-year strategic capital plan, which must be updated every four years. This act demonstrates our government's commitment to being transparent, accountable, and unbiased when making capital plan decisions while at the same time setting up the decision-making process to outlast political parties if there is an election within the short term. We are prioritizing the needs of Albertans to have access to consistent planning and decision-making processes for vital infrastructure projects in their communities.

Infrastructure is by its very nature a long-term investment, and it is up to the government to ensure it is being strategic in how it manages public assets in the best interest of Alberta taxpayers. Bill 73 establishes a framework for long-term priority-based planning of public infrastructure to guide how government prioritizes capital projects and spending, again, not just our government at this moment but future governments in years to come. We know that demographics and technology change and that government must build infrastructure today in response for tomorrow's needs. The Infrastructure Accountability Act will drive responsible investment in capital projects that positively impact Alberta's economic and social health.

On this note, the act establishes six criteria that the government must consider when evaluating a capital planning submission. First, a submission must address health, safety, and compliance needs. As we have seen in other legislation like Bill 49, the safety and compliance of workers in industries is of utmost importance. Although Bill 73 will create a stronger mechanism for fiscal responsibility and sustainability, we need to ensure that projects are safe and that the health and safety of workers and citizens of Alberta will be front and centre at all phases of the project.

Second, a submission must align with government priorities and strategies. For example, our government has committed since day one to making firm, economically sustainable choices across the board. We are prioritizing vital projects like building and renovating schools – 14 projects approved in March of 2021 – and hospital expansions, like in Red Deer, just to specifically name a few of the things that we are prioritizing but that would be flexible for any government to prioritize their objectives.

Third, submissions must foster economic activity and create jobs. Whether it be through the jobs now program, Alberta's recovery plan, or job grants, our government is committed to getting Albertans back to work, especially following the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring that projects will foster

economic growth is not just good for our province but for local communities, local workers, and the prosperity of the community these projects are placed in.

Fourth, submissions must improve program delivery and services. Mr. Speaker, this point barely needs explanation. Efficiency is key across all sectors and jobs. Having infrastructure that reinforces and enables improvements in efficiency and delivery is worth every penny we've put into it.

Fifth, the government must consider the life cycle cost of submissions and whether they will generate a return on that investment. If we are to ensure sound fiscal responsibility, especially in the current state of events we find ourselves in, we need to run the approval process from a financial standpoint. This goes back to earlier debate, with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talking about procurement and best value for all Albertans. We need to ensure that the money we spend is going towards sustainable, long-lasting projects for communities or that these projects can generate a return on investment. That's just common sense, Mr. Speaker.

Lastly and sixth, submissions must enhance the resiliency of a community. As one of my colleagues pointed out to me, many cities and towns in Alberta are quickly growing and expanding. We need to ensure that the projects will serve the community in the long term, encompassing financial, physical, and social needs and, hopefully, all three. A 20-year plan that is updated every four years will allow the government to check in on these rapidly growing communities and meet their project needs.

Mr. Speaker, if we were to sum up this bill in one statement, it would be this. We are taking the politics out of good decision-making, relying on evidence-based advice when choosing the projects which we fund. Alberta will be the second province after Ontario to legislate prioritization criteria for its capital plan and the third province after Ontario and Quebec to legislate the development and regular review of a long-term capital plan. We are following the lead of tried-and-true methods of management and adjusting our models to better match these methods.

At the same time this bill ensures that our government is being strategic in how it manages public infrastructure in the best interests of Alberta taxpayers. That is why I'm proud to support the Infrastructure Accountability Act, as it is good news for all Albertans, including government partners and job creators. We are raising the bar for transparent, evidence-based decision-making while delivering on capital projects that provide Albertans with the infrastructure they need, the support for jobs and the economy now and long into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to be back in the House, speaking to the issues that are important to Alberta. I guess we're starting off with a bit of a light one, but I'm happy to spend a few moments speaking to it anyways in anticipation of some other things that are coming later on. I've had the opportunity to read the bill. It just took me a few minutes to do so. It was easy to prepare my notes, but I guess I'm left wondering at the end of my reading of the bill kind of a little bit why it was necessary to put this into a bill. It clearly is a set of rules for internal procedure. When I was a cabinet minister previously, we had a similar set of rules, but we didn't turn it into legislation. It was just simply the rules with which we governed ourselves as executive members of the province of Alberta. I suppose, you know, as has been previously commented on about the government here in

Alberta, that sometimes you need a corset of rules when there's an absence of backbone to make sure things happen.

I guess that brings us here. We have a set of rules, which are really internal. I guess I appreciate the transparency that comes from this although I'm not sure that this is much different than what's happened in previous governments. But I always welcome an opportunity to get a bit of a glimpse as to the practices in the cabinet of this particular government. After I read through it, I can see that the role of the ministers is defined, which, again, seems fairly straightforward and obvious. It doesn't reveal much about the intention of the government per se. It's just a description of what it is that ministers are supposed to do. Of course, the same is true of section 3, which is the role of the responsible minister. Again, just a reflection of business practice as it pertains to Executive Council. That's fine. I have no objection to it. I guess they're just trying to ease us into this session a little bit.

Section 4, of course, tends to have a bit more detail. It describes a number of things that are important in terms of planning submissions. I'd like to spend a little bit of my time on section 4 because, well, first of all, I want to support some of it, to be honest. I think it's perfectly good that when cabinet decisions are being made and capital planning, particularly in this case, is under way, we ask ourselves some questions, and the questions have to go beyond the simple, "Can we afford it?" which of course is an important question, but it can't be the only question we ask ourselves when we go to build things for the province of Alberta.

The first section that talks about the risks to health and safety – does it increase compliance with the orders and decrease risks? – I think is a perfectly good question, a good thing to be asking, and I would support that. You know, I can say the same about pretty much all of them, so I won't read them all through. I certainly appreciate that these things are being thought about as capital plans are coming forward, so in many ways I support the inclusion of these things. Of course, I do like the fact that you are trying to make this consistent and perhaps even transparent. My kudos to you, I guess, for that piece.

But it does bring me to the piece that I wanted to speak about this evening, and that is not what's in that section 4 but, rather, what is not in that section 4. I think the intention of section 4 is to speak about how these capital projects are to be tied into the larger desires of the government to improve the lives of Albertans. The things that they have included in there are good, yet what we see is a very clear absence of a number of things.

7:40

For example, when we were in government, one of the things that we always asked ourselves was about the fact that there are inequalities existent in the world today based on historical factors, and as a result, there are some groups in society that have received fewer benefits of the goodness that is Alberta and the benefits that have come from the benevolence of our good landscape with excellent oil and gas resources and agricultural resources and forestry resources and so on, and the benefits of all of that have not been equally distributed in society in a way that is fair. So one of the things that we would ask ourselves is: what kind of an analysis can be done to look at how future decisions may, first of all, avoid those inequities that have been existent in our society up until this date and perhaps even repair some of those inequities?

One of the things, for example, when we were in cabinet was that we always asked for a GBA plus analysis. It was a gender-based analysis simply asking the question: are there groups in society that are inadequately supported by the way that we have created the structures of our society to date? That includes the physical infrastructure of our society. That, of course, you know, refers to

gender, but actually the GBA plus analysis is much wider than that. It doesn't just ask about how women have been differentially neglected or undermined by the decisions that have been made up until now but asks the question: are there any groups that have been systematically neglected or left out of the analysis of the decisions that we make?

It's surprising that when you actually sit down and ask that question of yourselves and of your government, you come up with some very interesting responses that you may not have even been aware of because the nature of the problems that they are intended to address is that they are about the structural prejudices of our system and therefore, because it's built into the system, we tend to not be aware of it. We don't always have a very clear sense of what it is that certain groups have experienced as a result of our histories in this province.

It would have been nice to have seen some kind of analysis about that, about the inequities, about the, you know: does this raise up a group that previously has not been raised up? Of course, that could go in quite a wide range of different analyses, including gender, but it could also – for example, the case, as I'm sure you know, I'm getting to is talking about our commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in this province and asking ourselves the question: has the infrastructure in this province been built in such a way to facilitate the well-being of Indigenous people and to bring them back up to a standard that is equivalent to the standard that's enjoyed by non-Indigenous people?

Now, we know that the analysis is pretty clear that in the history of the province of Alberta and pretty much throughout all of Canada, I would say, Indigenous people have not benefited from the infrastructure builds that have gone on. As a result, when we do an analysis of things such as average incomes, average home ownership, average jobs, consistent employment, all of those kinds of measures, we know that Indigenous people have not benefited from the goodness of society in the way that non-Indigenous people have. We can do that about different groups, not only Indigenous. I use it as an example because, you know, I have a responsibility in this House to address the issues from an Indigenous perspective as the critic for Indigenous Relations, but I could sit in any of a number of other chairs and ask the same kinds of questions. I don't see that kind of analysis in this bill, so it does make me concerned.

I know this government has said publicly that they are committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, so it's not an issue of ethics or principle here that we disagree on. We know that reconciliation is one of the things that we are all in this House committed to regardless of party, but that would mean, then, that we need to actually take steps or actions that lead toward that reconciliation. It's not simply a matter of making a verbal declaration and patting ourselves on the back and going home. We should be asking ourselves questions like: when we look at reserves across the province of Alberta, what percentage of them have drinkable water? It's a simple question, but it's one that highlights the inequity that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this province, and it's one that, of course, has been front and centre in the papers in Canada for many years now.

I was very proud as Minister of Indigenous Relations under the previous government to be part of a government that made a decision to put \$110 million into bringing clean, accessible drinking water to First Nations in this province. In fact, we are still, to this day, the only provincial government that has ever done that, that has actually put money into creating infrastructure specifically to address reconciliation. Unfortunately, since the UCP has taken over government in this province, they have failed to continue that program beyond the monies that were put in by our previous government, so they're essentially just letting that program fade

away into history once the dollars that had been allocated by the previous Executive Council have been used up. I'm disappointed to hear that.

I certainly would seek to have the minister correct this and to include in section 4 some analysis of the inequities and the desire to resolve those inequities as part of the practical commitment to reconciliation that I think both sides of the House can agree is important at this time and one that we could all support. Certainly, I'm offering it as a suggestion. I'm offering my support should that be included in some way. I even offer my advice-giving if you want to sit down and have a conversation about how that might happen, but the example would be the previous government bringing clean drinking water to First Nations in the province of Alberta. I'm very proud that we had in our time a number of First Nations connected – for example, Alexis, Paul band, Bushe River, Cold Lake, Whitefish – and would love to see that continue forward.

Another area that I would be interested in seeing is something about procurement. I'm going to give a very specific example here to address the issue that I'm concerned about because I have tried to address it by phoning the ministry over the summer – I've had three conversations with chiefs of staff from the ministries about this and indicated that, you know, I would bring it up in the House if it was not resolved over time, and it has not – and I have not gotten a satisfactory resolution in my conversations. That is the example of the procurement process that led to the construction of the washroom facilities at Hilliard's Bay on Slave Lake.

I happened to have an opportunity to be in Slave Lake and at Hilliard's Bay this summer, and what we found out was that the rules had been set up in such a way that if you hadn't actually built a facility like that in the last five years, you were not allowed to bid on the new project, which means that inevitably the pool of people who are allowed to bid on the project gets smaller and smaller because five years pass for many people. They did not in that particular case take the lowest bid by a very competent builder who had built many other things for the province and instead gave it to a big corporation that is friendly with the government.

7:50

I was very concerned about this decision. I was very concerned that the Hilliard's Bay washroom decision tended to indicate that there was no desire to support small Alberta business, and I would certainly love to see that changed. When I get an opportunity, I will speak more to it in this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in debate this evening? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the call.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that rousing introduction. I want to begin by just picking up the bill, of course, and listening to the deputy House leader speak to it briefly this evening. I have been going through the bill. I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton who just spoke before me on the important points that he touched on with regard to who benefits and who doesn't benefit. I say that because the deputy House leader in his introduction talked about how this bill will assist or create an unbiased way of addressing capital investments and projects over the long term for this government and governments beyond it.

When I heard the word "unbiased," I wondered about that because certainly any decision-making involves some bias. I think it's impossible, frankly, to speak about any decisions of government not having bias. I don't say that in a partisan way. I just say that that's the reality. There is no way to make long-term decisions to

have information come forward and to see it as something that doesn't have a tinge . . .

Ms Hoffman: If you would be so willing.

Member Ceci: Yes. I will give way to my colleague.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker and colleagues and to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for giving way. It's exciting to use 29.1 in this House around the new standing orders.

When the member was talking about bias, I certainly was thinking about some of the bias that Calgary families expressed they felt was impacting their educational opportunities in the city of Calgary following the last budget from the current provincial government. That was, of course, because there weren't new builds for Calgary public or Catholic families within the city of Calgary. There was one new build, I think, for a school part of Calgary public, but not within the city of Calgary. There were many parents who felt that the cabinet wasn't doing an adequate job standing up for Calgary families, and I wonder if that's similar to things that the MLA has heard in his constituency and in other areas.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to my colleague for intervening. You know, I think that's where I was going with regard to bias. The people around the table are making decisions, and while this bill attempts to codify what those decisions are, they're really no different than the ones that I understood as Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that we utilized when we were in government. We had deputy ministers who would work together to bring forward a capital plan.

As everyone probably remembers, we were elected at a time when Alberta was going into a recession as a result of the drop in the world price of oil, and we had a consult with a rather well-known person who spent a lot of time with budgets at the federal level. Mr. David Dodge came in, and he said: you know, one thing you can do to try and juice your economy and get it going and kind of mitigate the depth of the recession that is likely going to happen in this province is using your capital plan, borrowing some monies, and investing that in capital infrastructure, working with municipalities and organizations.

As my colleague . . . [interjection] Yes, I will give way to my colleague. Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much again to my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo and the former Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board. Yeah. This trip down memory lane – certainly, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, very clearly laid out an argument as to why investing in infrastructure was long overdue. Of course, seeing many cuts under former Conservative governments in this province, moving debt from a ledger into our critical infrastructure for our communities, for our province was something we saw. Of course, most of those cuts happened in a time of deep austerity.

We know that that had long-term, negative consequences for the people of Alberta, but one of the good, long-term, positive consequences is that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo felt inspired to get involved in, at that time, local politics. I want to commend him for that and ask: what are some of the projects that he considered, you know, sort of pillars of that decision to invest in infrastructure, particularly infrastructure in Calgary, the municipality he served for so many decades?

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to projects invested in Calgary over the 15 years – and I have a colleague here who was part of those years – we had a mayor in 2001, Dave

Bronconnier, who came in as a going-to-build mayor. I can remember that right off the bat there were three interchanges throughout the city – one was in River Bend, that I had left as the city alderman for, and my colleague across the way picked that up in 2001. We were both at the ribbon cutting of that interchange shortly after. I've seen the benefit of capital plans, really go-forward attitudes from that mayor who wanted to build Calgary because in those years there was growth in that city of 20,000, 30,000 people each and every year. We're not seeing that sort of thing in the province anymore, but in Calgary in those years we needed to address the growing needs of the population, and we did that with a lot of significant developments throughout the city.

I want to again go back to what my friend was saying with regard to Indigenous communities. I would add Métis people along with that. Those communities have not benefited to the tune of a significant investment. If this bill does anything with regard to planning, infrastructure, and can match some of the things that we did as a government, the \$100 million to bring clean water to the edge of reserves, that would be a good outcome of this bill.

I want to also just go back to the fact that when we were government, we had Minister Mason, who started off with the dual role of Transportation and Infrastructure minister, both of those portfolios, and he was followed by Minister Jansen. As I was saying, we used the processes that are identified here, that are codified in the act, and we used them for four years to set not only . . . [interjection] Yes. I'll give way to my colleague across the way.

Mr. Panda: Okay. I appreciate the member opposite's debate here, but I just wanted to remind you that those processes you used were never made public. So now we are trying to make it public, to bring the transparency.

Secondly, I hope you appreciate that when you led the Finance ministry and you set the limits for the capital plan, we guaranteed that level of spending, and we are still maintaining that. We added, actually, more money in capital planning for the reasons you're talking about. I just wanted to make that point to you.

Member Ceci: I appreciate your point. I'm glad you followed our lead with regard to investments larger than the previous PC government before us. We increased that capital plan 15 per cent on the advice of the former Bank of Canada governor.

8:00

I just want to say that transparency is important, but I think there are some shortcomings in this bill as well, and perhaps the minister can speak to that when he gets the opportunity. The shortcomings, for me, are recognizing that capital plans – and it goes back to my time at the city of Calgary – are made by local governments and by the federal government. In this bill I don't see the acknowledgement of trying to leverage up the plans that local governments have with regard to investing in their local communities. I don't see where the leverage can occur here from the federal government. There are federal government monies available for significant federal priorities that match up many times, Mr. Speaker, with provincial priorities and strategies. Where is that identified with regard to the criteria for capital planning submissions? It doesn't look, from my quick glance through this brief bill, like it is here, and I think that's an oversight. Perhaps someone from the other side, including the minister, can help me with all of that.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, just further on that point about leverage, is that there is no mention, there is no understanding of where municipal governments are. They are the recipients of a great deal of capital planning funds from this province and from all provinces and local governments, and I think it should be noted that

that sort of working-together approach is able to achieve far more than working in isolation. That's certainly one of the criteria, I think, here in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, and maybe that's what that point means with regard to section 4. Maybe it's there, but it's not identified, and I think it's an oversight that needs to be corrected.

We, of course, know that when we look at perhaps point 2, the role of ministers. As I said, that was understood in the way that it was standard operating procedure that you as the minister responsible would reach out through memo, through Executive Council, and all ministers were aware and then their deputies were aware that there was a time and a place for getting those submissions to the committee. Then the committee would work on that, and they'd come back with recommendations. There was kind of a coming up from the base, Mr. Speaker, and the base was local communities. That's what I think is being omitted in this brief bill. That's what I think needs to be further articulated in this bill. We, of course, want to assure that anyone who brings forward plans – let me just step back.

I think it's a good idea to make things clear to everybody who does capital planning in this province, and if this bill starts along that road to assist local governments, in particular Métis communities as well as Indigenous communities, recognizing that there's a federal responsibility for investments in Indigenous communities – and it's been a problem throughout probably the history of this province that Indigenous communities are told repeatedly: go to the federal government; don't come to the provincial government. To my regret, Mr. Speaker, Indigenous communities do not enjoy the same kind of infrastructure that the rest of this province does.

With those comments, understanding that previous governments worked to make as clear as possible the roles of ministers, the roles of departments in the bringing forward of capital submissions, the examination of those submissions along the criteria here and other criteria that we worked with – namely, can we leverage up the dollars that are available at the provincial level with other orders of government, other organizations? – all of those things, Mr. Speaker, have been done in the past, were done in the past to the benefit of Albertans and will be done in the future to the benefit of Albertans when capital plans are brought forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate this evening? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has the call, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to be back in the Legislature, and it's nice to be able to address a bill that I believe is going to serve the province of Alberta and the citizens of Alberta a great deal. You know, government is responsible for a lot of things. One of them is prioritizing and planning and designing and building and maintaining public infrastructure. As someone that was a teacher for many, many years, I understand at least a little bit the angst that many school divisions go through as they look at their infrastructure, their schools, and as they look at the students that are coming into their school divisions. They have to try and meet the needs of the students that they're teaching, and the infrastructure is a key part of that.

When governments start taking a look at the monies that they spend, a portion of those monies has to go towards the prioritizing and the planning and the designing and the building of the key infrastructure. Now, that's not just schools, and it's not just hospitals, as many people think about. It could be roads. That infrastructure is the skeleton upon which we build the economy and

the services in our province, and it's obviously very, very important. We as a province have to plan because we know that we want to grow our economy. We know that we want to be able to provide the jobs for future generations and for our children. We want to have the wealth within our society. We want to be able to attract business into our province. So the infrastructure that we provide as a provincial government is absolutely critical to the future of this province.

Now, it is the truth that, at the end of the day, it's taxpayers who ultimately foot the bill for this, for these projects. I think that many times when I've talked with my constituents, they sometimes wonder: "Why do decisions get made the way they do? Why is a hospital provided here or a road paved there or a bridge built over here? How do we go about making those decisions?" One thing we do understand as Albertans is that there isn't a money tree out there that we can just pluck the money off, that we have to make decisions and we have to prioritize things, so we need to be able to show the people of Alberta why things are really needed, why this infrastructure project is needed over perhaps another one, or why this one should be built sooner rather than later. What's the priority?

Previously governments have had, you know, informal criteria for capital planning, but often these informal criteria were less focused, and often these informal criteria were focused on things like economic impact and did not look at perhaps, say, the return on investment. Making sure that Albertans receive value for their hard-earned tax dollars is important, and it's believed by this government that it's time to change. As part of our commitment during the 2019 election we launched the MacKinnon panel, and as part of the MacKinnon panel we were able to look at our economy and for them to be able to make recommendations . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry.

Ms Hoffman: No, no. You don't need to apologize.

Mr. Smith: I'm getting used to this, so go right ahead.

Ms Hoffman: If the member would be so kind as to allow me to intervene for a moment.

Mr. Smith: Absolutely.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. I guess I'm just wondering if the member, through you, Mr. Speaker, of course, would comment on what happened over the last two and a half years and if there was open and transparent decision-making, at least among caucus if not among all Albertans, when it comes to these decisions. It's not the first time we've been in this House since this government was elected, so have the last two and a half years followed the intended, what the current member speaking would consider appropriate engagement, transparency, and accountability when it comes to capital decisions, or is this something that this government has gotten wrong to date and therefore needs to bring in this legislation to be able to correct the errors of the last two and a half years? I guess that would be my primary question. I'd love to hear a little bit more from a caucus member, specifically this caucus member, about some of the projects in his riding that maybe should have been prioritized over the last two and a half years and, hopefully, will be in the next year.

8:10

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. You know, I think that one of the things that we realize when we get into government – and I think you probably realize this as well – is that we serve the province of Alberta. We serve all constituencies, and we serve all Albertans. Sometimes that makes

it difficult on the minister, and sometimes there is an issue. I really appreciate that the Minister of Infrastructure has taken the time to take a look at the things that we need to look at when we start to consider infrastructure and prioritizing infrastructure.

I know that we were able to sit down a while back, and it was unfortunate, but there was a school that was literally falling in on itself in Drayton Valley, and the school board had identified this as a serious concern. So based on the criteria – and we talked a while, probably about a year and a half ago. I remember the first time that the minister floated this idea of having a system of priorities and a system of things to look at that would prioritize projects. I think that he's done a really good job, and it's allowed all of the members of this Legislature to be able to come before the minister and say: you know, we have some concerns about this infrastructure project or that infrastructure project. It allows him now to have criteria to be able to judge whether or not we would go forward. I hope I've answered your question.

As part of our commitment in the 2019 election, we launched the MacKinnon panel. The MacKinnon panel came back to the people of Alberta, and they made some recommendations. One of them was to develop a strong governance framework for capital planning, to support long-term capital planning by releasing a 20-year strategic capital plan, and to ensure that capital approval processes and systems consider future operating impacts as a mandatory requirement for approval. These are good things to take a look at when we start looking at our infrastructure.

Once again, this government, I believe, has delivered with Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act, and it follows through on those recommendations of the MacKinnon panel. I believe these things will play a major role in helping us to move forward with our Alberta recovery plan.

Now, when tradespeople were facing a lack of work earlier – we know we've faced some really tough times in Alberta; we've had low oil prices, and we've had the COVID issues that have plagued our economy, among other things – our government, recognizing these things, increased our infrastructure spending, increased our capital spending. I believe that will go hand in hand with – and when we were doing that, we were looking at some of these criteria that we were going to use for moving forward with our capital planning. So I don't believe that this bill will hinder the ability of the government to move things forward in times such as this, but it will focus it. It will help to mandate, for instance, the creation of a 20-year capital plan that must be developed. It's going to be released within a year of the proclamation of this bill, and I believe that will help to focus the planning for this province and the spending of hard-earned tax dollars that are given to this government in trust to be able to be used for the future of this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, it comes back to the taxpayers, I believe, and their curiosity.

Ms Hoffman: If I could.

Mr. Smith: Yeah. It's fine.

Ms Hoffman: If the member would be so kind – I really appreciated the response to my first question – I think I would like to know how that concluded. Highlighting some of the needs for a specific school in the riding: was that addressed? Has it been funded? Are those children in a better place now? And is it on each individual MLA? I think it's great when we're advocating individually for projects that we're aware of but, I would say, certainly when we work with folks who are close to the ground to be able to identify some of those additional projects.

Is that the only school that's in a state of significant need for infrastructure investment, or might there be others in the member's riding? Obviously, knowing that he was a schoolteacher, he's probably seen the inside of more than one of the schools in his riding in a variety of capacities, so are there other needed, additional investments in infrastructure, and is the member confident that there is a path to see that done under the current government's budgeting priorities?

Mr. Smith: Thank you to the hon. member for the intervention.

You know, I would argue and I would suggest that for each of us as MLAs on either side of this House, we're probably in pretty close touch with the municipalities in our constituencies, with the local officials that are in our constituencies, whether they be school board officials, whether they be municipal officials, whether they be county or town. And as they come to us, they come to us with the concerns that they have, whether that's highway 628 in the county of Brazeau or whether that was the need in Devon for a new recreational centre for hockey and for ice, and, you know, for being able to serve the needs of the people that we all serve, whether it be at the provincial level or whether it be at the municipal level.

You know, I've always been very impressed with the capacity of this government to be able to take the needs that have been expressed by the members of the Legislature and using some of this criteria and now codifying it and enshrining it in this bill to be able to make the decisions about: what is important, what is the priority, and how can we best serve the people of this province? In my constituency it's been in the school, it's been in some of the local facilities, whether it's the aquatic centre in Devon. I'm sure it's the same in your constituency as well.

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that it does come back to the taxpayers and their curiosity on how the decisions about public infrastructure get made and about the transparency that all governments in this province, when we spend taxpayers' dollars, should have with regard to the spending of that money and the prioritizing of that money for projects. In legislating the decision-making process regarding the important investments, we will provide Albertans with clarity and with certainty for how government operates its capital planning and execution. Now, a published capital plan will allow taxpayers and stakeholders the ability to see the priorities of the government when it comes to capital planning and spending, and, most importantly, it's going to allow them the ability to hold the government to account on the execution of the plan that they have placed forward for the people.

This act has been in the works for some time. Last year, between June and August of 2020, we received 3,172 survey submissions and 56 written submissions from a wide variety of sectors. These ranged from energy to health care to public safety to Indigenous communities. Several of the benefits of this act were identified in the results that were received from these surveys, and they were revolving around more accountability and more transparency and less political bias and better-informed project proposals. The response also supported the six criteria that the government must adhere to when planning public infrastructure.

Capital projects will be evaluated on their ability to address health and safety and compliance needs and align with government priorities and strategies and foster economic activity... [interjection] If I could finish, I would appreciate it. Okay? Thank you.

... to help create jobs and improve program delivery and services. We want to consider the life cycle cost of any kind of project that is being brought forward before the government for consideration and whether it will actually generate a return on investment – and that's actually a good thing to consider – and

enhance the resiliency of the communities that this project is going to serve, this capital project.

Now, in bringing this legislation forward, Alberta becomes the second province in Canada to legislate such prioritization criteria and the third province to require regular review of the long-term capital plan. And, as we all know, revenues for the government go up and down with the economic realities of the times, so the Treasury Board and the cabinet must be able to respond and to present economic realities by either moving projects forward or backward depending on the money that's available at any given time. This bill will preserve that critical ability, and, additionally, it preserves the ability for the minister to have flexibility if new emerging priorities arise that may be unexpected. Like the school that I was referring to earlier in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon, that was actually the newest school in town, yet there were some significant issues with it that were actually creating an issue of safety for the kids. This will allow the minister to still have the flexibility to address those kinds of emerging priorities, and this will allow the government the ability to adapt as needed.

8:20

Some have asked if this will apply to the MSI grants. MSI is delivered through Municipal Affairs, and the projects that get approved through these grants help to fund organizations or municipalities with their own capital projects and within their own capital plan, and therefore they will not be subject to this legislation.

Now, of course, once we have all of these nice projects, we need to maintain them, and capital maintenance and renewal is excluded from this act. This bill is also to help keep the capital plan for future projects transparent, and a different process is currently being developed to fit more appropriately with the smaller scope and cost that come with maintenance. It will have its own set of criteria, and that is being developed, so stay tuned. I'm sure that my good friend the Minister of Infrastructure is staying awake at night trying to figure out what those criteria will be and how that's going to come together.

Mr. Speaker, introducing and passing this bill is the right thing to do, I believe. Taxpayers work hard for every dollar that they earn and that they provide to this government, and it is only right that the government be responsible, that it be transparent with the money that we have as a government, that we take from the citizens of this province, and that we make sure we provide them with the services and infrastructure that they need and can rely on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to start by talking about – there are a few areas of infrastructure I want to discuss tonight in the brief amount of time we're allowed here in second reading, but I want to start, first of all, by talking about one of the projects.

When I think back on the time I had as the Health minister, of course there were a number of projects that were taking place across the province, but one that had been ignored by the Conservative governments before us for many, many iterations was the desperate need for a new cancer facility for the city of Calgary, a new Calgary cancer hospital. One had been promised by a Conservative Premier, and then the next Conservative Premier would come in and say, "Oh, maybe not," and then a new Conservative Premier would come in and say, "Well, maybe instead of at the university it should be on the south side, at the South Health Campus," and then, of course, there was announcement delay, announcement delay, and no progress had been made for decades.

I was so grateful to get very clear direction from both our Premier and from the people of Alberta, and especially the people of Calgary, through their election of so many candidates who were running for the NDP in that 2015 election, that a Calgary cancer hospital at the site closest to the university was necessary to replace the existing facility. Sometimes it does take, obviously, objection, an objective review of the evidence and the needs, but it also takes the political will. I would say that for far too long Conservative governments had taken the city of Calgary for granted and assumed that even if they failed to fulfill the needs of accommodating patients who were fighting cancer, to stay in their home community and be able to get cancer treatment close to home from world-class oncologists and other experts working in the field of cancer treatment and research and, of course, the exceptional nursing care and technologists who work to provide radiation and lab support in cancer service – it was very clear that there was a long overdue need for a cancer hospital in the city of Calgary.

The engagement had been done over many, many years, and that's why there were announcements that were made and then cancelled, and then announcements that were made and then cancelled, but fortunately the NDP Premier made it a commitment, and as a result, we are watching that project come close to completion. [interjection] I'm happy to accept the interjection.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and ask a question or two of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora about this particular project, which is one that, as she just mentioned, took many, many years, actually, to get off the ground, and successive governments didn't actually undertake to get it under way until, finally, the 2015 rendition of the Alberta government, under the NDP, got the project actually started. Of course, now it is fully under way. I'm wondering if the hon. member sees anything in this piece of legislation that would have prompted an earlier start on the cancer hospital in Calgary, or indeed if there were specific things that were done or decisions that were made within the government of the day that made sure that this cancer hospital actually got started?

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much for the question. Certainly, would it have started sooner? Well, it should have started two decades sooner, when it was first announced by a Conservative government, but they certainly made the decision to ignore the needs of Calgary's cancer patients and southern Alberta cancer patients and instead do things like send out Ralph bucks and make decisions around infrastructure investment other than in building essential, life-saving facilities. Through some of the engagement we did very shortly after the election, it was very clear that there were many Calgarians who were keen to step up and support the building of a world-class facility.

One of the stakeholders who stands out was the co-chair of the patient and family council for the Calgary cancer centre, Charlotte Kessler. And I will make sure that I send this reference to *Hansard* for the spelling of her name. So many of the people who've stepped up to help give feedback on critical projects related to cancer treatment are either patients themselves or people who – I recall a dad whose wife had passed away, and he and his child were part of the announcement because they wanted to do something good in his wife's legacy as they continued to move forward.

I don't believe that the political will was there by any of the prior Conservative governments, and I don't think that this bill would have required them to have built that facility. I think that it does take political will to ensure that you actually listen to evidence and to science. Of course, we're living through a pandemic right now, where the government has demonstrated an overt willingness, an

overt desire to ignore evidence and science in making decisions about governing when it comes to the response to public health and public safety.

Do I have confidence that they're going to apply an unbiased judgment when it comes to capital projects? Well, judging one's future performance: the best predictor is current and past performance, and I would say that it has not been giving us a high degree of confidence that that will be the likely outcome.

Also in terms of the Calgary cancer centre, I want to acknowledge that there are sitting members of this Assembly who – when the project was committed to finally, the Conservative Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock referred to the essential, life-saving facility as a “fancy box” – a “fancy box” – which I think gives no respect to the patients in Calgary and in the region or to the expertise that went into designing this essential, life-saving facility.

I can tell you that when you get pushed into a radiation vault, it might feel like a box. It doesn't look very fancy. Sometimes there is a picture of nature on the ceiling to try to distract you from the agony that you're about to endure in being able to fight for the cancer that you're living through to be terminated or at least regressed in some way to give you some peace and some comfort. But those 10 vaults that needed to be built for Calgary because they were offering not near enough radiation services to meet the demand of cancer patients who live in Calgary and the south zone, I think that referring to things like fancy box is certainly disrespectful to the expertise and the needs that those residents were certainly articulating for decades, Mr. Speaker.

I see somebody else trying to intervene, but I hear the voice of another. I think I'll talk for one more minute, and then I'm happy to take an interjection from the minister. I hope that he sees the importance and the necessity of the Calgary cancer centre, which I think actually might be in his riding or adjacent to his riding, because definitely I can tell you that the people of Calgary made their needs very clear to us over quite some time. I hope that he has been able to effectively communicate the needs for health facilities right across this province, and I think that that need has been highlighted now more than ever. [interjection] If the minister would like to interject, I'd be happy to hear his comments, if he wants to at this time.

8:30

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I just want to set the record straight here about the Calgary cancer centre. In fact, we had an option when we came in to slow down the project, delay it, cancel it. We didn't do it. I put every sincere effort to accelerate that project, and I want Albertans to know, Calgarians to know that the project is tracking ahead of schedule and on budget, and in every sincerity, we are finishing that.

Now, you talked about schools. School boards actually, you know, collaborate with the Education department to get their schools prioritized, but with this criteria legislated, they can align their selection criteria and still work through whether it is municipalities or school boards. Because now this criteria is open and public, they can utilize it. I just wanted to answer that.

Ms Hoffman: It's not every day that a minister stands up and expects a pat on the back for not stopping the building of a cancer facility, but certainly I'm happy to say that I'm glad that you didn't stop the building of an important, life-saving cancer facility. I wish that the current government hadn't stopped the building of an important, life-saving facility for children in need of mental health supports. The CAMH that was announced and also committed to for children in Edmonton and northern Alberta to address their mental health crisis was snowballed. So the significant delays – I

guess we might hear an argument. Slowing down something to a snail's pace or stopping it completely, whatever term the minister wants to use, to the folks who live in south Edmonton, including folks in Edmonton-South West, the south Edmonton hospital: we haven't had a new hospital in Edmonton since the 1980s. Seeing that slowed down or delayed or stopped certainly hasn't given people a lot to celebrate in south Edmonton.

I would say that, yes, it is good that the current government, through you, Mr. Speaker, didn't do something so cold and heartless as to stop the construction of an important, life-saving facility that previous Conservative governments had slowed down and stopped and played political football with. I am glad that that didn't happen with this project, which was, of course, so much further along in its construction than had ever been before. I guess we will celebrate the fact that Calgary didn't see the same fate as Edmonton did under this government's infrastructure plan.

I also want to acknowledge that . . . [interjection] Oh. I will be happy to accept an additional interjection.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did want to intervene momentarily just to ask a question that occurred to me as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was speaking about the Calgary cancer project. I know that, in driving through Calgary past that construction site, there are a number of other projects going on, in particular highway construction projects going on alongside and nearby that major construction site. It also occurred to me as of yesterday, when I drove by the Misericordia hospital, that there's a major expansion, of course. The new emergency department that was initiated under the Member for Edmonton-Glenora when she was the Health minister is under construction, but not only that, there's also LRT construction going on in front of the hospital. Added to that, there was a new announcement just a couple days ago that part of 170th Street is going to be closed off because there's a pedestrian bridge going to be added nearby, that AHS is involved in as well, adjoining to West Edmonton Mall. What complications exist?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for highlighting, of course, the work at the Misericordia. Also, that same work was happening with the planning for the south Edmonton hospital. When you have an opportunity to work with other orders of government and maximize that investment to ensure they have opportunities to leverage regional growth within a municipality, I think that there are great opportunities for maximizing efficiencies and certainly finding win-wins for communities in terms of building essential infrastructure, and creating transit and service-oriented development, I think, is a part of that, so the investment in making sure that there is an LRT expansion here in Edmonton, that there are opportunities to expand public transit in Calgary and in many other parts around our province, I think, is just smart planning.

When the government, in this bill, talks about not considering matching funds or leveraging funds as part of the decision-making process, I can't help but think how short-sighted that is. Of course, if you have an opportunity to work with another order of government to create opportunities for success in your communities, we should be stepping up and considering what other additional investments there are. I will say that – not capital related, but the Minister of Education certainly wants the nonprofit sector and the voluntary sector to step up and help with school nutrition programming in terms of making future decisions about where those programs get expanded to. I find it interesting that the government doesn't care about maximizing and leveraging investment when it comes to infrastructure, but when it comes to

feeding hungry children, that is a high priority around the school nutrition program as it moves forward.

I also want to say that the MSI – it's a really interesting way to say we need less bias and less intervention in decision-making when the government that's bringing forward these bills has a track record of cutting funding to municipalities to enable them to make decisions about their own infrastructure needs. When you look at the cuts that municipalities have seen and the erosion of their ability to make decisions around their own infrastructure and maintenance and then bring forward a bill that you claim is going to lead to less bias, it doesn't exactly ring a bell of truth or confidence.

I also want to say that leveraging every dollar – when I think about one of the projects in the riding I have the honour to represent, Edmonton-Glenora, the provincial government was the first to step up in support of the Roxy. I have a sticker about rebuilding the Roxy. The Roxy Theatre was burned down not long, actually, before the 2015 election. There was a horrible fire. Many Edmontonians had a connection to the Roxy, and it was a nonprofit theatre operating in Edmonton-Glenora in the lovely 124th Street area. I was incredibly proud that our government said that the arts matter, culture matters, and that we are going to be a part of rebuilding the Roxy because it is a public good to have public art, including an opportunity to engage in live theatre.

There were individuals who donated and were part of that cause, but it was the capital investment from the province of Alberta that leveraged funds by the country of Canada and by the city of Edmonton. By stepping up and being a partner and helping the community to rebuild, we were able to certainly maximize that investment to try to fast-track this project and bring it back to the beautiful 124th Street area. I know that the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, I believe was the riding, was part of that announcement. It was certainly a good-news announcement around the sod turning and the construction that happened there.

I think that there are opportunities for us to work together in collaboration certainly within this place and also within other orders of government. I think this government would be wise to actually practise some of what they espouse in this House on decision-making in this area and in many others. I think that the safety and well-being of our municipalities, including the infrastructure that we all rely on, is something that deserves careful, thoughtful consideration.

I just want to say that the reference to basically not having political interference is pretty rich given that this government chose very early on in their term to make an at least \$1.3 billion gamble on the Keystone XL. We still don't have all the information as it pertains to that project and how much was actually invested. If they would've actually applied a bit of political analysis there, they probably would've realized that betting on Donald Trump to win the U.S. election wasn't exactly a sound investment to be making with Alberta taxpayer dollars. They probably would've benefited from applying some political acumen, Mr. Speaker, to the considerations of the day. For a government that espouses to care about taxpayer dollars, that certainly was very disrespectful to every public dollar that was invested in that project in such a short-sighted, risky decision.

8:40

There are many examples of this government failing to lead by the examples that they protest to espouse in this legislation. The examples of some of the cancelled health care facilities – oh. Here's another one, too, Mr. Speaker. When would we have needed a lab, a quality, state-of-the-art lab, more than in the middle of a public health pandemic, when people were waiting in excess of a week to be able to get their results back for their COVID-19 tests? We

could've really used that state-of-the-art public lab for Edmonton and north zone at the time when we would've needed it most. That is a project that was committed to through the previous government, that was already beginning construction, and that the current government couldn't rush in quickly enough to step in and cancel. I have to say that we sure could've used a government showing a little bit more forethought, a little bit more respect, a little bit more engagement when it comes to the necessary capital projects.

Since my time is coming to a close, I want to celebrate some of the ambitious decisions that were made in the years prior to this government being elected. I know that the Minister of Infrastructure has referred to, "Well, school boards can submit plans, and they can work through a process," and that is absolutely true. Through that process, Mr. Speaker, in the last budget, the city of Calgary didn't get new public or Catholic schools within the boundary of the city of Calgary. That doesn't mean they didn't ask for them. They were absolutely in their capital plan request that went in to the province, and their needs assessments, but this government chose not to fund those projects.

Contrary to 2017, for example, just one year that I pulled up, new projects in Edmonton included the Meadows and Pilot Sound; in Calgary included Cranston, Evergreen, Coventry Hills, Auburn Bay; in Airdrie a new school; and in Hillcrest with Rocky View; nine replacement schools, including one in Edmonton for the francophone board and one also in Edmonton for the public board; Banff elementary with Canadian Rockies. Sturgeon had Camilla school. There was a replacement in Grande Prairie with the public district; with Buffalo Trail in Irma; Huntsville, Iron Springs; Palliser. The list goes on, Mr. Speaker, and this is what governing with your values looks like.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good to see you and be back in the House again, especially to be able to talk about such an important bill, something that I had the pleasure of campaigning on in three elections alongside the Minister of Infrastructure. I'm just so proud of him and this government, to finally be here having this discussion and moving forward with a bill that's going to increase transparency and accountability when it comes to infrastructure planning in this province.

Since it's been talked about so much already today, I do feel compelled a little bit to talk about the Calgary cancer centre and maybe to kind of set the tone for the conversation. I remember as I was campaigning, I knocked on a door, and I had a wonderful conversation with one of my constituents – I guess it wasn't my constituent at the time; I was asking for the job to represent her – and she asked me where I stood on the cancer centre. At that time I expressed my absolute full support in moving forward with the cancer centre and making sure that we had care, local care, for Calgarians to be able to get help for that, that they didn't have to transfer between south and Foothills, and they could get that care in one location. That was back in 2012, when I ran alongside the Minister of Infrastructure in full support of the cancer centre, and we campaigned on that together.

In 2015 I went back to that same door, and sadly the woman who I'd had such a wonderful conversation with before, back in 2012, had passed away of cancer. I had a good chat with her husband again, who told me what had happened, and again in that moment, 2015 campaign, I expressed my full support for the Calgary cancer centre. Again in 2015 I ran alongside the Minister of Infrastructure and in full support of that cancer centre. Again in 2019 I knocked on that door again and talked to that same gentleman and announced

my full support for the cancer centre: again, why I'm so proud of this Minister of Infrastructure, this government for continuing to move forward with that project and the importance that that is for my constituents and all Calgarians and Albertans, frankly speaking.

The challenge, I think, for governments is that they operate on four-year cycles, and often decision-making gets tied to those four-year cycles. The problem is that, for Albertans, we need to make sure that we're thinking more long term than that. That's why it was so critical that we came up with a plan that would show transparency and accountability and make sure that we had criteria that was going to help ensure that we were thinking long term and planning well for the future and that we're removing the politics of it all so that we could make the best decisions for Albertans, and Albertans could feel confident in knowing that no matter what government was the government of the day, they were making good decisions for the long term and could build upon that with consecutive governments.

That's why today I rise to speak to Bill 73. Edward McCauley, the president and vice-chancellor at the University of Calgary, said:

Given the significant costs of building and maintaining capital projects, regardless of the financing approach taken, it would be beneficial for our province to develop and communicate clear methodology or criteria for selecting capital projects.

I think those words ring true. The Infrastructure Accountability Act will help the government of Alberta make important capital project investment decisions that provide Albertans with the needed public infrastructure. Additionally, it furthers Alberta's recovery plan by supporting jobs and our economy. This act demonstrates the Alberta government's commitment to be transparent, accountable, and unbiased when it comes to capital plan decisions.

The act establishes six criteria that the government must consider when evaluating a capital planning submission. These criteria help government decision-making around capital projects to best support jobs and the economy while providing Albertans with the essential facilities and public infrastructure they need. Criteria for submission, including addressing the health and safety and compliance needs, the protection of workers and industry, is critical. The submission must also be aligned with the government's priorities and strategies. Next, the plan must promote an environment for job creation and economic activity. Alberta's government is committed to getting Albertans back to work, clearly shown through these initiatives like the jobs now program and the Alberta recovery plan. [interjection]

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Sure, let's go for it.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. I guess you're just outlining, of course, section 4, in which you're talking about the things that will be included, the criteria. I just wonder if you might, while you're addressing the criteria that are in there, address your thoughts about the absence of certain other criteria, some of which I mentioned slightly earlier on in the evening. I'm just wondering if you have some thoughts about the fact, for example, just to give you one very specific one, that there is no criteria to look at our province-wide commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in terms of infrastructure builds. Perhaps you have a thought. I'm sure you're going to go on and speak well about the things that are there, and I'm just wondering if you might take a moment to talk about the things that are not.

Thank you.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Sure. I mean, I appreciate the member's comments and thank him for the intervention. Of course, this

government and myself are committed to truth and reconciliation and certainly looking forward to any amendments that he might have to pitch in regard to what that might look like. I'm not sure what the wording of all that would look like, but happy to have that conversation at that time. [interjection] Sure. Another intervention.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, through you, it was never my intent to legislate an entire process of capital planning. That's why, you know, we are legislating the criteria which will give that confidence and certainty in project selection and prioritization. But specific to that member opposite's repeated ask about reconciliation and other things: those are all addressed in the 20-year strategic capital plan. If this bill is passed, Bill 73 will implement the 20-year strategic capital plan very soon. Page 50 of that 20-year strategic capital plan addresses what the member opposite is talking about.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Perfect. Great to hear. Again, knowing my government, our government is committed to truth and reconciliation. Thank you again, Minister, for your leadership on that end.

Additionally, submissions must improve program delivery and services. Proposals must consider life cycle costs and whether they will generate a return on investment and innovate infrastructure here in Alberta, and must support Albertans now and in the future.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Lastly, these submissions must enhance the resiliencies of communities across this province. Towns and cities across Alberta are expanding exponentially, and we need to make sure that we have the infrastructure to support these communities right now and into the future. Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation has been drafted to minimize regulatory requirements while fulfilling a platform commitment to new legislation.

8:50

How does similar legislation look in other jurisdictions? Ontario has legislated a prioritization criteria, and both Ontario and Quebec have legislated the development and review of long-term infrastructure plans. Like Alberta, both Ontario and Quebec's legislation focuses on long-term, evidence-based planning and the need for the government to be accountable and transparent. Other jurisdictions like British Columbia and Manitoba have legislation specific to infrastructure; however, focus is strictly on transportation, so I'm happy to see that broader focus here.

Madam Speaker, Bill 73 will help Albertans understand how the government decides what capital projects to deliver in their communities and how decisions are made to ensure that the best use of their taxpayer dollars is always top priority. In addition, this piece of legislation strengthens Alberta's recovery and diversification plans, supporting capital project decisions, which ultimately encourages businesses and new job creators to invest right here in Alberta.

The Infrastructure Accountability Act demonstrates our government's commitment to being transparent, accountable, and unbiased when making capital decisions. This act does this by legislating a prioritization criteria guide evaluating capital projects and government framework for development of the annual capital plan. Finally, the development of a regular update of a 20-year strategic capital plan will help all types of public infrastructure. Through Bill 73 the government is raising the bar for transparent, evidence-based, and long-term decision-making. [interjection] No. I'm just going to finish. I'm almost done. Furthering Alberta's recovery plan is critical for Albertans, which is why the Infrastructure Accountability Act is so important.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my fellow members – Madam Speaker. Jeez. My blind side is this side, too, so I don't know what's going on for me here.

Madam Speaker, I urge my fellow members to think about the future of infrastructure and capital plan decisions in this province. Albertans need the kind of support that we see in this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and join in the debate in second reading of Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act. Now, one of the things that's been discussed so far and that was raised by the Minister of Infrastructure is that the intent of this bill was to codify in legislation many government processes that already occur as part of capital planning. Indeed, some of my colleagues who were in the cabinet during the time that we were in government noted that that was the case. Certainly, one could argue that if these processes have been in place and have been practised by consecutive governments, there isn't necessarily the need to codify them. But then again, certainly I think we have learned during the term of this government that one should never underestimate the level of incompetence to which a government might sink. I can recognize that perhaps, then, this codifying of this policy needs to be there for times when we may have governments who through lack of competence or perhaps through lack of ethics may choose not to follow best practices.

Now, I think of this in particular given how many members from the government side have risen tonight to praise themselves and pat themselves on the back for this bill and how they have spoken of this bill. The Member for Lethbridge-East talked at length. He talked about how this is a bill that's about taking politics out of decision-making, that this is a bill that raises the bar for transparent, evidence-based decision-making, tried-and-true methods of management in the best interests of Alberta taxpayers, echoed by the Member for Calgary-Klein, talking about it being a plan to show transparency and accountability, that they were making decisions for the long term, echoing his colleague and saying that it's about removing politics from the process.

Madam Speaker, that utterly belies what we have seen from this government on so many important issues on behalf of Albertans. Let's take COVID-19, for example. I recognize that this bill is about infrastructure, but since we are talking about this government's commitment to transparency, as has been raised by many government members, I want to put this in context as we talk about this bill.

When it comes to COVID-19, we have repeatedly seen this government refuse to release the information they were using to make their decisions, decisions that have affected hundreds of thousands of Albertans. The government is saying in this bill that it is incredibly important to them to codify that decisions are made according to the evidence and that that is made transparent to Albertans, but that flies utterly in the face of this government's practice over the last two years.

This government says that this bill, Bill 73, on infrastructure, is about removing politics from making decisions. Madam Speaker, we have never seen a government that injected so much politics into decision-making. I find it difficult to believe that this bill truly represents who they are. As government members have claimed as they debated this tonight, indeed what we have seen on the COVID-19 pandemic, indeed most recently on this fourth wave, is a government that's paralyzed because of its own political infighting. This is a government that has repeatedly put its politics ahead of

public health and done incredible damage. Indeed, we are still recovering from the fourth wave that they plunged us into.

So when they talk about this being a bill that, in the words of the Member for Calgary-Klein, shows they are making decisions for the long term, removing politics from the process, Madam Speaker, we have seen quite clearly that that is not the case as we have seen our health care system utterly overwhelmed because of decisions made by this government. [interjection] No, Member, I will not give way. Decisions made by this government have been tainted by politics whereas in this bill they are saying their intent is to remove politics from the process. They say that their intent is to work on long-term decision-making? They've utterly crashed our health care system at enormous cost and suffering to Albertans, at enormous cost to our treasury. There's never been a government that has done so much damage. [interjection] Certainly.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to my colleague for allowing an intervention, because I find very much what he's saying to resonate with me. I have the Grey Nuns hospital in my Mill Woods area, and this August, as the fourth wave proceeded and our health care system moved to the verge of collapse, talking to the health care workers there, certainly they were not talking to me about a government that was making decisions for the long term, making transparent, evidence-based decision-making. Instead, they were concerned because during that time, while the fourth wave was . . .

The Deputy Speaker: As this is an intervention, I'll just ask that you have a very pointed question during this time rather than making a statement.

Ms Gray: Comments relating directly to what my colleague was saying. Absolutely, Madam Speaker. I appreciate your guidance.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions are the intent of the intervention. Please tailor the question to the topic at hand from the speaker.

Ms Gray: I apologize, Madam Speaker. Not as a point of order but under 13(2). Having read the new 29.1 – and I will find the exact reference. I realize we're just formulating the standards here, and I certainly do not mean to be difficult, but under 29.1(4)(b)(ii) I as an intervenor "may only ask questions or make comments on matters relevant to the speech on which they have intervened." So under 13(2) I would really like to just direct you to the idea that I should be allowed to make comments. I appreciate your ruling, and I will sit.

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: I would tend to agree with the member as we all learn the rules and the interventions of this Assembly. I think I will take the opportunity to just express some caution in maybe getting back on topic. I'll allow the intervention to the relevancy of the speaker that was just speaking, and perhaps when the speaker goes back to the speech, we'll go a little bit more back on the bill.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We were talking about government decision-making at the Grey Nuns hospital to tie this directly into the bill. I will simply say that the Grey Nuns hospital opened in 1988 and was the last new hospital in the city of Edmonton, and since this government has taken government, they have extended the timeline on the south Edmonton hospital, a critical infrastructure project.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you to my colleague, and I do appreciate her intervention there and certainly do recognize that this

government indeed has been less than transparent about its intentions about the south Edmonton hospital as it has on other major infrastructure projects. We can think of, certainly, the green line in Calgary, which is another case where this government dragged its feet, intentionally dragged out the time of that project, went against many of the principles that are contained in this bill. Speaking of job creation, speaking of doing benefits, speaking of long-term benefit, this government for – and speaking of taking politics out of decision-making but instead aligning themselves with others who are known to be part of the conservative movement in Calgary who also, to oppose the mayor, were dragging their feet and attempting to obstruct the green line project.

Again, much as my comments around this government's handling of COVID-19, I find it difficult to believe that this government actually means what it says in this bill. Now, indeed, these provisions do codify in the law these practices on behalf of infrastructure, and it is a good thing, Madam Speaker, because indeed, as I noted, this government has failed to follow some of those principles in the decisions it has made.

Certainly, in principle I see no reason to oppose this legislation, but I will certainly give it some more thought as we proceed to sort of see where that may land. Now, certainly, the kinds of questions that are being asked and the kinds of principles that are being codified in the bill certainly would have been excellent questions to ask when this government decided to gamble \$1.3 billion on the KXL pipeline. Now, as has been noted by some of my colleagues, Madam Speaker, there was an utter lack of transparency from this government about that deal, about what it contained, about what was being put at risk for Albertans, much as this government has repeatedly hidden information on the COVID-19 pandemic. [interjection] I'll yield.

Ms Gray: I appreciate it. You've raised an important issue around the \$1.3 billion KXL, the lack of respect paid to taxpayers' money, and this being an infrastructure bill. I know you were taking careful note of the UCP and government members who have spoken to this bill. Have you heard through the debate any members talking about the interaction between this infrastructure bill and the decision by this government to gamble money that was supposed to be part of that capital plan, that very large amount on the bet that Donald Trump would win the election? I've also been paying attention to some of the debate, and I may have missed that. I wondered if you caught any reference to that through the debate on this bill so far.

Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to my colleague for that question via intervention. Indeed, I have not. As we have often seen, members of this government choose when it is convenient to put politics directly into decision-making and to look the other way when their government is making a decision that they feel is politically beneficial for them, contrary to the principles that are laid out in this legislation. Now, as I was saying and as my colleague was noting, the \$1.3 billion gamble on the KXL pipeline: that was not something which showed evidence of long-term decision-making or of evidence-based decision-making. That showed, as we have seen far too often over the last 19 months, a Premier and a government that were more interested in their potential political gain than in doing the right thing on behalf of Albertans or on what that return might be.

Now, I'm thankful that Albertans have become increasingly aware of that habit of the government. I suppose it may explain why this is one of the first bills that we have brought before the House as the government recognizes the severe need they have to save face

in an attempt to rehabilitate their incredibly damaged image and regain some of that mightily lost political capital here in the province of Alberta.

Now, of course, throughout the process we have repeatedly called on this government to provide more transparency to Albertans about that gamble on the KXL pipeline, much as we called for them to provide much more transparency on the \$30 million a year war room, or the embarrassment of a public inquiry, the report for which just dropped this week, which indeed, certainly, did not demonstrate what this bill is talking about, evidence-based decision-making. Quite the contrary: decision-based evidence-making is what we saw on display.

Again, I'm not denying that Bill 73 may in fact accomplish some good things, but what I am saying is that this is one small potentially bright spot on an incredibly dark record for a provincial government. [interjection] I'll yield.

Ms Gray: Thank you again. Listening carefully to your remarks, particularly around the fact that so many government members have spoken to this bill, talking about the need for transparent evidence-based decision-making, I would note – and you haven't referenced this yet, but I'm curious about your thoughts – that this legislation codifies some criteria in order to make those evidence-based decisions, but completely absent seems to be ensuring alignment with regional, municipal planning and co-ordination, so co-ordinating with other levels of government, making sure that there are opportunities to leverage federal dollars. When you have a piece of legislation that government MLAs are saying will ensure that there is the best possible decision-making and codifying that, that other levels of government and ensuring alignment with them is not one of the things you find in this bill even though it was one of the things said during engagement.

Do you have thoughts?

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you again to my colleague for raising a very relevant point and indeed one which I was coming to. Indeed, it is deeply concerning that in this bill amongst the criteria that are listed they do not include a requirement that they consider engaging with regional and municipal planning to ensure that their goals are aligned with the local goals. Now, while I'm disappointed not to see it, I am not surprised. I think we saw from this government in their early days and certainly continuing an extremely aggressive attitude towards municipalities in the province of Alberta, indeed a good deal of destruction of those relationships that began perhaps with the – actually, it began earlier but certainly was well represented by the tearing up of the big-city charter, which the government had promised in their election campaign they would in fact support. But like so many other things, say the contract with doctors, they decided they could unilaterally tear that up, and much like the contract with doctors, that has led to a real souring of the relationships. Now, of course, we do have new city leaders across the province of Alberta, and we have seen some improvement in tone after the election, so I suppose we shall see.

But that said, the lack of including that here in this criteria within this legislation, particularly given the kind of games we saw this government play with the green line in Calgary, when they decided they didn't like that mayor, well, that suggests to me, then, that we really do need to have some tighter controls on how government behaves, which is the intent of this legislation, to try to codify better behaviour and better decision-making on the part of government. This is one area where that would certainly be worth while.

9:10

My colleague mentioned opportunities to leverage federal dollars. I think of right here in the city of Edmonton, here in my constituency, where our downtown is struggling to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges that we are facing with individuals who need better supports, particularly housing. The city of Edmonton has stepped up and shown leadership in building five sites of supportive housing around the city, leveraging federal dollars, and were stymied and blocked from further federal dollars because this government refuses to step up and pay its share, because this government refuses to align itself with the regional and municipal planning and priorities.

So that is, I think and to my mind, a real gap in this legislation because we have seen time and again that, for whatever words this government chooses to speak about accountability, about transparency, about informed decision-making, this is a government that relishes power, that makes decisions on its own without talking to others, indeed injects politics into its decision-making, probably more so than perhaps any government we have seen for many years, just as I don't think we have seen any government in the history of this province that has done so much damage to our public health care system for precisely the same reasons: lack of transparency, lack of evidence-based decision-making, lack of consultation with those who are most affected, lack of alignment with the local priorities.

I'm looking forward to further debate, the opportunity to see if this government, which it has refused to do so far, is able to engage in any level of self-reflection, appreciate any level of irony in the statements it makes and then the actions it takes, because certainly I think we are seeing a resounding response from Albertans that they are tired of the hypocrisy. This government may choose to try to pat itself on the back for bringing forward this legislation and trying to claim that in doing so it is ranking itself as a transparent government that listens to Albertans and is working to make the best decisions for them. But, again, this is a small drop in the bucket of all of the poor decisions, of all the incredibly damaging decisions this government has made that went directly against the kinds of principles they are putting forward here. Nonetheless, the fact that the government has done a plethora of incredibly bad things is not a reason to stand in the way should it manage to do something good.

I look forward to continuing to engage with my colleagues as we continue to consider the other elements that have been brought forward in this bill such as the fact that this legislation codifies that the government must release a 20-year strategic capital plan, updated every four years. Now, of course, within that strategic plan there is no list of specific projects. Instead, the plan will consider things like demographics, the technological trends, the projected industrial base, some of the factors that will help guide the ministries in how they think about all things capital planning.

Now that, indeed, Madam Speaker, is something I support. Considering the details, the factors, what may be the impediments: those are thoughts this government maybe perhaps should have put into place when it was considering the language which the Premier spoke about vaccination or the COVID-19 virus itself last year. Rather than barreling on as he did and creating further obstacles to us being able to get through this pandemic and indeed laying much of the groundwork for this fourth wave. So I think this is legislation that this government should consider perhaps in a wide range of contexts if it has any wish to be able to continue in this role beyond the next election. These are principles it might do well to apply to far more areas than simply infrastructure.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, thank you. I don't know why the timer is not going off, but that is the end, right? Okay. Wonderful. Thank you for your grace as we learn this intervention process. I actually quite enjoyed this piece, so I look forward to this new process in the Chamber as we move forward with debate.

At this time I will seek any speakers wishing to speak to second reading. The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise for the first time this session to speak in support of Bill 73, and just before I get going, I just wanted to comment that I was so thrilled to have the minister come to my community along with several other ministers, and we were able to do a tour of several major infrastructure projects that are happening in my community.

One of them is the new Chester Ronning school, and what a beautiful school that's going to be. You know, Camrose has a growing population. We have a lot of young students, and having that education facility there and investing in rural Alberta is so very important. In fact, sometimes rural Albertans feel like they're forgotten, maybe, that they're left behind a little bit but – you know what? – not with this government. I feel that we've really invested in my community. In fact, Daysland has a new waste-water treatment plant going in, Heisler does as well, and the city of Camrose does, too. We also have the Catholic school design/build approved, so I'm really happy about those investments that our government is making. Thank you, Minister.

During the summer of 2020 we collected over 3,200 submissions from everyday Albertans, job creators, and government partners, many of whom expressed support for the bill and the six prioritizing criteria, the governance framework, and the need for long-term capital planning. We are always looking to improve accountability, increase transparency, and select the best project proposals. The implementation of this bill will ensure we stay committed to these priorities.

With input from Treasury Board, crossministry engagement, crossjurisdictional research, and stakeholder engagement, six prioritization criteria were developed: first, by prioritizing health, safety, and compliance, the government can identify if the project is expected to decrease risks to health and safety or increase compliance; secondly, strategic alignment ensures projects and programs align with government strategic objectives, ensuring the best outcomes possible; thirdly, the positive economic impact each project or program creates, including direct or indirect job creation and economic development activity; fourthly, the expected results from improving program delivery and services that the project or program will provide; fifthly, consideration of the full cycle costs and return on investment of the project or program; and finally, the extent to which the program is expected to enhance the resiliency of the communities. This bill will create a 20-year strategic plan which must be published within one year of the act coming into force.

I would like to thank the Minister of Infrastructure for his work to bring this legislation before us today. Infrastructure projects, big or small, play a huge role in rural communities. These projects can include building playgrounds, sport fields, or even building indoor recreation. The paving of dirt roads, twinning of highways, overpass construction help to get us to where we need to go faster and safer. The building or expansions of hospitals, schools, social supports, or other essential institutions: with so many infrastructure projects waiting for approval at any given time it is essential we ensure they provide the greatest positive impact possible.

Our communities often have no choice but to make decisions based on infrastructure projects based on the information of larger provincial infrastructure projects laid out in the annual capital plan.

It is important that we are being strategic with each program to ensure proper management of public assets. This list of criteria will help Albertans better understand where these projects fall in the province's list of priorities. This allows government partners such as school boards, municipalities, Indigenous communities, or even metropolitan region boards to make aligned decisions on future plans, knowing the set-out criteria. It allows job creators to align business plans to the criteria, ensuring its future success. People within local communities often don't understand why projects take so long to complete, and now we're giving them the ability to see where their local projects fall.

9:20

Within each project and program that this government invests in, the act will allow us to keep the interests of all Albertans top of mind. This bill is providing accountability and transparency for how government invests in projects and programs. As we continue to make these decisions, we have added more than 20,000 new jobs. We will attract more investment from all around the world, that continues to expand our ever-growing job market.

All of this is the reason why, when this bill comes into force, a 20-year strategic capital plan will follow it just a year after. To ensure transparency and accuracy of implementation of these projects and programs, every four years the strategic capital plan will be updated. The plan will help guide projects and programs to stay in tune with capital infrastructure trends, to maximize the beneficial impacts to Albertans and their communities. With this bill we commit to responsible investment in capital projects that have positive impacts on the economic growth of Alberta and well-being of its people. Other jurisdictions, like Ontario and Michigan, have benefited from this similar legislation, so why can't we?

By supporting this bill, you're supporting transparency. You are improving the well-being of our communities. You are creating investment and jobs. We are taking a common-sense approach and adding criteria to ensure that public assets are used to their full potential to maximize the benefits to Albertans. I encourage all members to support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

With that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 49 Labour Mobility Act

[Debate adjourned October 26]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join the debate on Bill 49 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate the opportunity to rise for a second time this evening and speak to our second bill for debate here during this session of Legislature. Of course, now we're speaking to Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. Now, this bill is apparently focused on making it easier for skilled workers to come to work in the province of Alberta. That indeed would be a good thing. Alberta has long been a province that has attracted some of Canada's brightest and best. Alberta has long been a province that has had the youngest average age of all provinces in Canada because this was a province that was seen to have opportunity.

Now, of course, that did continue to be the case up until recently, Madam Speaker. Recently there was an article published in CBC News, Why Calgary Is Losing Its Young Adults. Now, in that

article it notes that Calgary's population has increased by more than 20 per cent over the last decade, making it one of the fastest growing cities in Canada. Indeed, nearly a quarter million more people have called the city home from 2010 to 2019, with growth across every age range except for one. During that period the number of 20- to 24-year-olds shrank by 4,400, a decline of about 5 and a half per cent. What we are seeing is that much of the population growth is instead now weighted towards 55 plus.

Indeed, one young woman from Calgary named Chloe Loblaw left Calgary after high school to go study health sciences at McMaster University in Hamilton, and she said that she doubts she'll come back. She said that many of her peers felt the same way, that they did not see a future there because they don't want to work in oil and gas and fear, if they live in Calgary, that's a kind of written-in-stone future for them, so they felt the need to move away.

Certainly, Madam Speaker, I support anyone that wants to go ahead and make a living in oil and gas, and certainly that has been an important industry in our province. That will continue to be an important industry in our province, but it is not the only industry in our province. [interjection] I appreciate, Member, but if you'll give me some time to sort of build my point a bit more, I would be happy, then, perhaps to hear your thoughts.

Now, they note that there have been challenges in that Calgary companies haven't been as active in recruiting young people, and that could lead to a situation where we have a talent pool that may not be replenished. If that's so, then existing companies, when they do need to hire that young talent, are going to face challenges doing so. Indeed, it becomes a challenge for attracting new employers to the city and indeed to the province because we do not have that healthy pool of skilled labour.

Now, unfortunately, we have seen that trend worsen under this government. The StatsCan population data for 2021, as noted by Dr. Trevor Tombe, was released today, and it shows that the change in Alberta's migration pattern by age has gotten worse. Indeed, he says that it was a stark difference from a few years ago in that we are now seeing a further loss of individuals in their late 20s and early 30s. The largest net outflow from the province of Alberta in the last few years under this government has been young people in their late 20s and early 30s.

Now, that's not surprising in some respects, Madam Speaker, given that we have a government that has been busily undermining so many of the things that are most important to individuals of that age. We saw this government cancel supports for the tech industry early on. Thankfully, there was enough momentum built up by the industry and a lot of good work that was going on in the community that they survived past that ill-judged decision of this government. We have indeed seen some growth, but unfortunately this government sent a clear message early on that ideology came first, even should it choose to reverse course later.

Mr. Schow: Now? Make way?

Mr. Shepherd: Sure.

Mr. Schow: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to interject. I would like to go back a couple of minutes, when I initially stood up, to a comment the member made regarding supporting people who would like to work in the oil and gas sector. I would like to ask that member, through you, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, if the member would be able to point to any specific examples where he supported bills or actions of someone actually working in oil and gas, maybe a Facebook post or maybe a way he voted in the Chamber. I'd love some specific examples of when that member actually supported someone working in oil and gas.

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly, Madam Speaker. If the member would care to, he could browse through my Facebook photos, note the many times when indeed I was in public wearing my support badge for the Trans Mountain pipeline, the times I spoke in support of that in the House, the posts that I made on social media in support of that pipeline, and indeed my presence at our celebration when that pipeline was purchased by the federal government to support Alberta, after lobbying by our government.

To continue, this government has introduced an incredibly regressive curriculum that is opposed by a vast majority of educators, certainly opposed by the vast majority of parents who have written to my office and indeed many that have written to their offices as I've seen the CCs, as I know my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has.

This is a government who has attacked our health care system. Indeed, today we found that there was a survey released by ThinkHQ which showed that 70 per cent of Albertans say that our health care system has gotten worse under this government, and that is accounting for the COVID-19 pandemic. This government ended the support for \$25-a-day child care in the province of Alberta, has allowed insurance rates to skyrocket. This is a government that has made this a less attractive province. Indeed, while we have them bringing forward a bill to make it easier, in their words, for some in health professions to come into our province, they have been busily driving others out.

9:30

I referenced earlier this government's decision to tear up their contract with doctors. Well, they passed legislation to empower themselves to do it. Then they tore up that contract and immediately went to war on social media against physicians as the pandemic began and carried that on throughout the pandemic. We have seen a number of doctors exit the province of Alberta. We have seen an increase in the number of young medical graduates who said that they will not stay to practise in the province of Alberta as long as this government remains in power.

Indeed, I just received an e-mail today from a front-line health care worker, sent to myself and the Leader of the Official Opposition – she says hi to us both – that says:

I know that you and your colleagues are doing your best to hold this awful "government" to account.

Today I arrived at work to find out that yet another person is leaving my team – that's three full time Occupational Therapists in less than two weeks and I don't even work in acute care. I will be handling a caseload for assisted living sites that have a total of over 400 residents, as the only full time [occupational therapist] left on my immediate team that visits these sites. We handle thousands of rehab referrals over the course of the year. We are essential – we implement fall prevention programs for our frail seniors, we assist clients with complex medical needs to do what they need, or want to do, in creative ways. We were the ones visiting our residents when Covid started and sites were on lockdown. Residents said our visits kept them going when they were unable to see loved ones. We were at the epicenter of the Covid disaster. Now we are burned out.

To say that I'm scared and stressed with this exodus is beyond an understatement.

I thought you should also know what is happening in community health care as there is a lot of coverage in the media about the number of health professionals leaving acute care. I've been told that there's a massive shortage in rehab professionals across the Edmonton zone.

What we have seen, Madam Speaker, is that this is a government that, as I said in our discussion on the infrastructure bill, has sent a message loud and clear to the rest of Canada that this is not a jurisdiction that puts evidence and science first. This is not a

jurisdiction where we have a government that is planning for the long term and making investments in the best interests of the people of the province, and as a result, we are seeing some of our best and brightest pulling up stakes and leaving. [interjection] I give way.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, the kind of situation that I hear my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre – frankly, the situation he’s describing in this province now is very depressing. From moving here in the 1980s and being fortunate enough to be elected to Calgary city council in 1995, seeing the growth that that city was under, this province was under was hard to keep up to. It was a beautiful thing.

My question to my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre is: what do you think is going to turn the tables on all of this? Certainly, it’s not this bill alone. What do you think is needed to turn the tables on the destructive policies that have been put in place by the UCP government?

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In reply to the question, I would say that what is needed is a government that will reverse these damaging policies, a government that will show actual respect for front-line health care workers, that will set aside the antagonism that this government has shown towards those individuals, a government that will walk back some of the serious cuts we’ve seen to areas like postsecondary.

I just met today with members of the executive of the students’ union at the University of Alberta, and they outlined for me the serious concerns they have with some of the drastic increases in tuition that the Minister of Advanced Education is looking to allow.

Mr. Schow: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Shepherd: And, no, Madam Speaker, I will not give way.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me on the point of order. I do rise on 23(b)(i), speaks to matters other than the question under discussion. Now, prior to the member accepting the interjection from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre was well into kind of the five-minute mark of talking about government policy that we have implemented that he disagrees with, certainly his right, but none of it was germane to this bill specifically. Then the intervention itself wasn’t even relevant to this bill, nor was the member opposite’s answer. I do know that you have given significant latitude in the past, but I do ask that you tighten this discussion up and keep it relevant to this important piece of legislation, which I believe will attract new employees to this province, because employees love opportunity and there’s a heck of a lot of it here in Alberta.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This is clearly not a point of order. The member was speaking very much to the bill’s intent to bring labour mobility to greater fruition here in the province. Surrounding that topic, of course, is the difficulty in job creation that we see here in the province, and that’s been created by the pandemic conditions that this government has allowed to grow. The member was clearly talking about the economic conditions that

we’re in and the employment conditions that we are suffering in this province in relation to perhaps the benefits that might be brought by the Labour Mobility Act, Bill 49.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, this is clearly not a point of order. I think that any latitude that you may have allowed the member was certainly warranted because the member was certainly flowing down the river of truth and maintaining a straight path towards connecting with Bill 49.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I think there has been a significant amount of latitude offered in this debate, and while I think that the hon. member has tied lots of the ends together, this is a really great opportunity to maybe get us back on track a little bit more. While I will not find a point of order, I will caution the member in the remainder of his time.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Indeed, I will continue to speak to the substance of the bill and certainly more so than the intervention that was brought forward by the Deputy Government House Leader, who brought the point of order, oddly enough.

Debate Continued

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly, with this bill we have perhaps an attempt by this government to undo some of the serious damage it has done to the supply of skilled workers in the province of Alberta.

Now, we do have some concerns that this legislation, from what we can see here, doesn’t appear to flow from Alberta’s short- or long-term employment forecasts. It does not seem to be designed to address specific current labour shortages; for example, the many skilled tradespeople that we need, like construction workers. Of course, that in itself goes against the principle that these members have been espousing so much this evening about their government being dedicated to long-term decision-making and evidence-based decision-making. That does not seem to be evident here in this bill.

One of the other concerns we have is that while we are offering those opportunities here in the province of Alberta, there’s no guarantee that this will be reciprocated in any other province. There are not currently any other reciprocal agreements or any anticipated legislative changes in other jurisdictions. We know that other provinces do in fact have labour mobility statutes, but Alberta would be the first one to include timelines and enforcement with penalties.

Now, that is interesting to me, Madam Speaker, given the number of times I have heard members of this government, when they first sat in opposition or sitting in government, talk about their deep, deep concern about bringing in, for example, statutes and regulations around greenhouse gases and how we shouldn’t be bringing in restrictions on ourselves that are not mirrored in other jurisdictions, we should not be putting ourselves in an unbalanced position for the damage it could do to us economically. But when it comes to these statutes, they want to move ahead with a system of enforced timelines and penalties that do not exist in any other jurisdiction in Canada. I do have to question how much indeed thought and planning has gone into this, how much this is intended to benefit Alberta, and how much this is intended to try to burnish the appearance and the reputation of a Premier and a government that have badly damaged theirs.

9:40

I would also note that the Premier, of course, has said that, yes, he recognizes that other provinces have not in fact agreed to recognize Alberta credentials in the same way, but he’s working on it. Forgive me, Madam Speaker, but I do not place much confidence in this Premier, who has shown such bellicosity towards anyone

who does not agree with him, who has been so condescending in his attitude, certainly towards other leaders within this province, certainly to anyone who disagreed with him on his decision-based evidence-making on COVID-19, who has been incredibly derogatory to other leaders in Canada, other provincial leaders, indeed to a governor in the United States who holds the fate potentially of one of our pipelines in her hands, referring to her as brain dead.

I don't have a lot of confidence that this Premier is going to successfully negotiate when he is finished with his charade of a referendum in which he betrays an incredible lack of understanding of the Constitution.

Mr. Williams: Will the member give way?

Mr. Shepherd: No, I will not give way.

That is not a man in whom I place faith to get Alberta the best deal. Certainly, again, as I referenced, his \$1.3 billion gamble on the KXL pipeline shows how much thought, care, and attention he gives to making deals that benefit Albertans as opposed to his own politics and agenda.

As we continue in this debate, I look forward to perhaps hearing from the government if they can provide some actual timelines for these agreements which the Premier says that he has negotiated. Who is participating in these negotiations? Who is actually at the table? Which ministers is he meeting with? Which other business? Is this something that we are going to celebrate in our future?

Mr. Williams: Will the member give way?

Mr. Shepherd: Indeed, at this time, Member, no, I will not give way.

Mr. Williams: Oh, "no" answers. Okay.

Mr. Shepherd: We look forward to the opportunity for the government to perhaps provide some studies that demonstrate, documents that demonstrate the research that has been done, studies that would demonstrate that this bill will indeed address the actual labour market shortages in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on second reading of Bill 49? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to jump in on Bill 49. I do like to take the opportunity every once in a while to congratulate the government on sometimes not the whole bill but at least aspects of the bill, as I did earlier this evening with the previous bill. Certainly, some pieces I liked although I expressed my concerns about the overall absences in that bill. In this particular case I'm just very interested to see the government work on labour mobility as an issue in that it's an area that I think is important for us to be working on. I think that the freedom of movement of people to seek employment in Canada is actually a really positive thing that we should all be trying to get a little bit farther down the road on in this country. I certainly would like people to be able to go from place to place and still be Canadian, which means that we get the advantages of having a universally accessible labour force in this province, just like we have universal health care and other services, so that no matter where you are born in this country, you have an option, an opportunity to take advantage of the things that are good about this country and to provide for your family, of course, which is why I

reject the extreme members of the government side of the House who would actually like to see us separate from this great country.

It's kind of an odd contradiction that they have members who wish to move Alberta away from unity with the rest of Canada, to have a separate police force, to have a separate pension plan, and so on, and here they are asking for a joint project. I guess, you know, given that I am used to the inconsistency of their value system, I want to at least commend the movement in this particular instance and hope that we can actually work together in the House to add some pieces, to round that out a little bit more, to get a little bit farther along.

Previously I have, you know, in the consistency of my stance, supported this kind of labour mobility issue. I know that the previous minister of labour had brought into this House some legislation on the efficient accreditation of foreign credentials. We actually had a fairly, I thought, reasonable, intelligent, respectful engagement about that issue, because again it's an issue that I support on the basis of the values of having labour mobility so that people can take advantage of opportunities to improve their lives and the lives of their families. It was very nice to have that opportunity back then, as I do now, although I must express some disappointment.

At the time the then labour minister did promise to come back with a second bill to do some pieces that I had suggested at the time were missing from that bill and said to me, "Hold on; we'll get to that." Unfortunately, it failed to actually come back with the second half of that bill at any time. I'm hoping the new minister of labour might pick up where the last one failed and bring forward some legislation on recognizing foreign credentials. That would be really nice to see, and it would be a nice twin to this bill on labour mobility within the country. I say thank you to the government for bringing this forward, and I'm hoping that our conversations will allow us to have some effect on making this bill more robust and useful to citizens across the country.

I mean, I certainly do have some concern about the circumstances that have led to this bill being necessary, of course: the fact that this government's actions over the last couple of years have resulted in the first net migration out of the province that we've seen in many, many, many years. I remember in the last House that the then opposition accused our government of causing a net migration, were proven wrong by the stats, and had to withdraw and apologize for that accusation, but in this case we don't need to do that because the stats are very clear that under the UCP government we are seeing a net migration out of the province. Regularly, daily, many of us who are on social media of various natures are seeing posts by individuals in the province indicating that they are making the decision to leave.

9:50

Unfortunately, it turns out to be true of many of the young people, who are in the position of establishing their work at this particular time, who are telling us they're going to leave. It's always so disheartening to see a young doctor, for example, many of which I have seen saying that now they are finishing their residencies or their internships or whichever piece they happen to be at, they're making a decision to leave this province after we have spent all of this time educating them and, of course, all of this money educating them, bringing them up through the education system to the postsecondary system, into medicine, which is a very expensive program to teach people, and now, having invested all of those resources from this province into those young people, them making the decision that they cannot stay in this province given the relationship between the government and the profession.

As a result of chasing these highly educated, hard-working, very necessary people out of this province, we have a bill that's trying to somehow shore up for the failings of the government. [interjection] Oh, sorry. Would you like to intervene?

Member Loyola: Yes, please. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Through you to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, one of the things that I really appreciate about the insights from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is that he always applies Catholic social teaching to a lot of his insights that he offers within the House, and of course a big part of that Catholic social teaching, as he well knows and some of the members here know, is a big influence of social justice. Of course, a big part of that, which is not very commonly known, is actually the defence of workers' rights specifically. I can tell you that when the Catholic Church is standing up and actually supporting workers' rights, you know, I feel a little bit vindicated because it's not only in my home country where I came from but even here: if you stand up for workers' rights, somehow that makes you a communist, right? Of course, nothing can be further from the truth.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much for that intervention. It certainly is true that my studies of Catholic theology have greatly influenced these kinds of positions that I take with regard to mobility, you know, having in my early years of university read papal encyclicals on the nature of labour and the nature of work and the rights of workers such as *Rerum Novarum* or *Quadragesimo Anno*, in which the Popes at the time advocated for exactly the kinds of things that we're talking about today, with a particular focus on workers and asking societies to support workers in providing for their families and doing so from a place of social justice and not from a place of using workers, labourers in order to benefit the few.

So, I mean, I certainly appreciate the fact that that's an issue that's inherent in our discussions here today and why I congratulate the government on making a step forward in this and why I am consistent in my philosophy with regard to recognizing foreign credentials as well as recognizing the rights of workers to be mobile within the country of Canada. You know, I really wish I would see that consistency on the part of the government in terms of their positions with regard to support of labour unions, which have been highly supported through the Catholic Church and other institutions as the right of people, not simply a desirable, nice thing to have but actually a right that people should have and should be supported in that. I certainly could provide references and articles to demonstrate that that is in fact the position.

But since we are not in the church, I won't go too much further into it now. I'm happy to have that conversation with anybody who would like to have that conversation. It certainly is what defined the value position that I have come to and why I chose the NDP to run for, because I thought it was most consistent with those values. In fact, that's been supported even recently by Pope Francis, by the way, who put out a recent letter that reinforces much of what I've just said. But I feel like that's a bit of a diversion, so I will get back on topic.

Thank you.

With regard to this bill I want to say as well here – and here's another chance for me to say thank you to the government. Let's just add this to my list. That's the third time tonight. Boy, this is quite wonderful. I wish the whole bill was something I could support and not just the pieces of it, but this one: we'll see.

I know that the government has made a decision to go ahead without any kind of reciprocal arrangements with other provinces. I certainly have some disappointment around that in the sense that I wish that somehow as part of this there was a concerted effort to get other provinces to do exactly the same kind of thing and that

they were coming together at the same time as they were having other provinces come to their Legislatures and do the same kind of thing. [interjection] Yes. I'm happy to take the intervention.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Member, for allowing me the intervention. I think that your comment there just shows perhaps the inconsistency of the members opposite, because they want to see reciprocity with other provinces. They realize we do not govern other provinces, and the truth is that we have a net benefit to opening this up without reciprocity because we need more labour in Alberta. The reason other provinces do not want the reciprocity is because they will not make out as well as we do when we do this. Perhaps that's why in four years of government the NDP was not able to get any of this across the line.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you for that inconsistent statement, but I just want to say that what I was saying before I was interrupted was that, in fact, I celebrate the fact that the government has made the decision to go ahead with this without the reciprocity. I said I express my disappointment because I certainly would like to see for the sake of labourers a reciprocal arrangement, but I understand that the government, you know, hasn't made an effort to move ahead on that.

But here's my celebration of what the government has done, and that is that I actually do believe that we go ahead without reciprocity in situations like this because it is the right thing to do and that sometimes we need to stand up and do the right thing even though we know we are not going to have that given back to us by others, in hopes that, in time, they will come to see the rightness of our actions and they will in fact join us. So my point here, had the member wished to stop long enough to listen to the point before intervening, is that this is the right thing for the government to do, to move ahead without the reciprocity, and I thank them for having done that. I wish they would do that more often, that they would do the right thing at the right time and build a better world, because I would love to be able to celebrate them on that.

But let's talk for a few minutes in whatever time I happen to have left – I'm not sure there's much left – about what I am worried about with this bill as it presently stands, and that is the fact that the bill is inconsistent with the larger acts of the government to date, that we are desirous of having opportunities opened up for workers and for labourers, and we certainly want to support opportunities when they exist, yet we find this government, on the one hand, creating a situation where we're losing workers because of their behaviour and having to bring a bill like this forward as a result of all of, you know, their poor governance, frankly, and at the same time they're doing a variety of other things to hurt people in the labour force. [interjection] Would you like to intervene?

Member Loyola: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, through you to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I was hoping that you could really delve into specifically: what are the real problems that we're actually experiencing here as Albertans in terms of the reason why people are actually leaving Alberta and, of course, the fact that, you know, the health care system is being attacked, fighting with doctors and nurses, the fact that it's costing Albertans much more without an affordable daycare, the \$20-a-day daycare program, but not only that; even the cost of insurance, the cost of utilities in their house, all that's going up? I actually remember getting a phone call from a constituent stating all of this explicitly as the reason why he and his wife, who were planning on staying here in Alberta, raising a family, were actually going to be leaving Alberta for another province. I'm hoping that you could focus on that.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much for that question. I don't have a lot of time, so I'll just quickly lay out a number of the ways in which the government is undermining the very intention of this act. You have already spoken, of course, to the fact that they have had a very hostile relationship with many of the workers in this province, and I think that that is something that is of deep concern for us and has resulted in the necessity of having this kind of a bill.

10:00

So for bad reasons a good thing is happening, but also at the same time as having a hostile relationship with the labourers in this province, the workers in this province, they've also reduced supports to universities, colleges, and technical institutes, where these labourers get the training they need in order to do the work. If we were supporting people to get into these programs and to be successful in graduating from these programs, we wouldn't need to be asking people from other parts of the country to come in. At the same time, they are defunding programs that actually support people getting into workforce programs. I was visiting one today, in fact, that lost its funding in helping people to actually get schooling, to get training so that they can actually provide labour in this province, and this government has actually taken money away from them.

So both at the educational level and at the pre-educational level we've seen some really inconsistent behaviour from this government and, of course, the actual attempt to reduce the wages of the workers that they're now asking to come into this province, particularly, for example, the nurses. Now, of course, they were somewhat unsuccessful in this, not due to their own seeing the light but, rather, being forced into a change of tactic by a mediator, but, you know, this government is actually trying to take money away from people.

I don't know how you can stand in the House and say, "We want to attract people into this province in order to do work" and say, "But if you get here, we will be hostile to you, and then we will take your money away from you." It is so inconsistent that it just makes one shrug at the intention of this government, where they're going, and if they have an actual plan underlying their behaviour or whether it's just hit and miss, shoot from the hip and see what happens, that kind of behaviour, which is what we've seen consistently in the last two and a half years in this province.

I know that at future times in the reading of this bill I will have an opportunity to articulate some of the specific concerns and identify some of the specific ways in which they've been undermining labour in this province and undermining people wanting to come into this province and increasing the likelihood that people will want to leave this province, all of which are at their feet, a result of their behaviour. I will have an opportunity to say: if you are doing A, why are you, then, over here in B undermining the intention of A?

You know, it's surprising that this government has done this, but if there is anything the government has been consistent about – it is my complaint that they're not – it is that they've been consistent in their inconsistency. They've been consistently unable to take a value position and to move forward that value position without somehow undermining it somewhere else.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to rise this evening to support Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. The act is a bold step to address the impending labour shortage by making it much easier for skilled workers and professionals to come to our great province to help grow our economy and create jobs.

This act will enable skilled, certified workers from all across Canada to bring their knowledge, their experience, and their expertise to Alberta to build our economy no matter which province or territory they come from. Meeting labour market needs is a critical challenge, and we must rise to that now and in the future. This bill ensures that we will be able to do this while diversifying the economy at the same time. This is, of course, one of the main components of Alberta's recovery plan: to create jobs, diversify the economy, and strengthen the workforce with skilled workers to meet the demands that are out there.

Bill 49 also works in tandem with the job-creation tax cut. I think that for the recent Dow plant that came in, it was a major plank of what attracted them and to eliminate all procurement exceptions under the Canada free trade agreement as well. All three of these strategies combined will ensure that Alberta is one of the freest and most competitive economies in all of North America.

This legislation will affect more than a hundred regulated occupations in Alberta, including but not limited to optometrists, engineers, accountants, veterinarians – and I know we've got a shortage of those in rural Alberta – architects, and dentists. There is a huge scope of professions that skilled workers all across the country will be able to come here and participate in.

Now, I'd like to take a moment to talk about the economic benefits that this legislation has the potential to provide to the province. A report by C.D. Howe shows that increasing labour mobility could grow Alberta's economy by \$2.8 billion. Other studies estimate that internal barriers to free trade within Canada may be costing the Canadian economy as much as \$130 billion per year. The most costly element of restriction to internal trade is interprovincial difficulties surrounding labour mobility. Bill 49 is not only in Alberta's interest; it's in Canada's interests as well.

Finally, the Conference Board of Canada report estimates that improving Canada's credential recognition system could potentially increase the annual incomes of these affected workers by an average of \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year, totalling in excess of \$3 billion for those with out-of-province credentials. This increase in income for these workers means not only a boost to our economy but also an increase to their quality of life.

In order to accomplish these goals and to shape Alberta's workforce for the better going into the future, Bill 49 has a robust set of elements that will be implemented. Bill 49 introduced uniform legislation requirements for regulatory authorities that govern regulated occupations. This will reduce barriers for out-of-province certified workers to come and work in Alberta. These barriers are a key issue that Bill 49 is trying to reduce. The Labour Mobility Act will do this by introducing maximum time frames for registration decisions. The proposed time frame is 20 business days from the time the required documents are received. This is very important because it will prevent applications from getting lost or being bogged down in red tape, never to see the light of day again.

I know how frustrating it can be to deal with these regulatory bodies in their current form, so Bill 49 is aiming to streamline this process by holding the regulatory agencies a bit more responsible. Bill 49 will provide a requirement for an appeals process and processes for internal reviewing of applications. This will give applicants a fighting chance if they feel that their application was unjustly declined. Too often a declined application results in a feeling of hopelessness for those simply looking to better their lives. This will make the application process freer and more transparent. Bill 49 will also determine what information or documentation types or quantities our regulatory authorities can request. This will help make this process smoother and more streamlined and, once more, reduce red tape by providing a more uniform requirement for

application. This should result in reduced frustrations for would-be applicants.

Another thing Bill 49 will do to achieve its stated goals is require all information regarding documentations and fees to be available on a publicly accessible website. This will not only reduce frustration for applicants but ensure that everything they need is in one convenient place for their convenience.

Finally, Bill 49 will define offences and financial penalties for those who contravene the act. This is necessary to ensure that everything remains fair, transparent, and above board. Equality of opportunity is a key aspect of our province, and it's why workers want to come here to put their skills to good use. Removing the barriers to labour mobility so that Alberta can attract skilled workers to come here and work will have so many benefits for this province.

There is, of course, a generic boon to the economy, and this is obviously important. Some of these workers may come here to start their own business; this, in turn, will employ other Albertans so they can feed their families and contribute to the economy. I have an example of this in my own town. We had a big hailstorm go through Vermilion and wipe out a whole bunch of shingles, and they actually had an individual come and start a company to redo roofs. I thought: okay; he's here, and as soon as that's done, away he'll go. That was 12 years ago. He's still there, and he has become a very significant part of the community.

Removal of these barriers will create a cascade of jobs, both primary and secondary, all of which mean more money being pumped into our economy.

10:10

Ms Hoffman: If you're open to an interjection.

Mr. Rowswell: Go ahead. Sure. Yeah.

Ms Hoffman: Well, thank you very much. If you are open to an interjection, I'd love to ask a question specifically around: I've heard from so many Albertans who are looking for work right now, particularly in the skilled trades, and feel like there aren't a lot of opportunities for them to have local employment. I worry that some of them might think that inviting additional people from out of province to come in and work in these sectors might have a negative impact on employment opportunities for some folks locally, and I'm just wondering if this has been something that's been discussed in caucus and if you share those concerns or if you have heard other feedback. Are there a number of areas where you think your constituents would be welcoming people to come in from out of province to work in those sectors that they might be looking for work in right now? Your feedback on that would be greatly appreciated.

The Deputy Speaker: A quick reminder to still direct comments through the chair.

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker.

Mr. Rowswell: You know, I've got an example. In Lloydminster, for example, a good friend of mine manages an oil business, and his biggest problem and his biggest concern is when people left the oil business when it went sour – right? – when it went to negative pricing. People actually left the industry. He's afraid to try to get them back. The biggest problem I'm hearing right now from the people in the oil business in my constituency is that they can't find help. I'm finding that for lots of people. So if there are unemployed Albertans that need work, come out to Vermilion and Lloydminster. We'll find them a job. We'll take them from anywhere. That's what I've experienced.

New workers coming here will use money they are making to eat in restaurants and just generally support the economy, so this will result in a surge in the entire economy, all Albertans, not just those coming here to work as a result of breaking down the barriers. This is absolutely good news. This will not only benefit our cities; it'll benefit, like I said, my own constituency. Rural areas also need skilled workers as much as urban centres do. There are carpenters, skilled construction people needed to build and repair our buildings. There is always a need for more dentists in rural areas, more optometrists, accountants for taxes, plumbers. We need all these people, for sure. This will benefit our rural areas the exact same way as our urban areas, and I think it's safe to say that our rural areas are in dire need of that right now.

This resurgence could help our rural areas tackle issues they have been facing for a long time like infrastructure construction and repair, working on improving rural broadband. You know, that's a big deal. We could use some help there. I know that my own town has become their own ISP and created a lot of jobs just building the towers and patching into the fibre. People are getting pretty innovative, and they needed people to do that that know what they're doing.

You know, the best way to attract jobs to benefit all Albertans is to have Alberta be a magnet for new business investment. We must be competitive in a global market. We're already seeing this happen due to our efforts with capital investments into hydrogen and the booming film industry. Bill 49 is just another step towards increasing our global competitiveness and making our province a destination to invest and set up a business. We need to make bold moves to increase our attractiveness to the global market, reduce red tape, and attract skilled workers from all over Alberta.

Alberta's recovery plan and Bill 49 are just some of the bold steps the government is taking to improve our economy now, when it's most needed. Skilled workers want to come here and participate in what makes this province so great. We value hard work, willingness to learn, entrepreneurial drive, self-sufficiency, and a can-do attitude. Bill 49 is removing barriers for labour mobility and will ensure that workers who embody these values are welcome here. Our doors are open. Come to experience all that Alberta has to offer, and we can grow together. That is the reason that I'm behind and I support this bill, and I'm happy to do so.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for that opportunity. You know, overall, I believe that I'm supportive of attracting skilled workers to this province. I have started to read this bill, and I'll continue to read it and dig into it and reach out to people to talk to them specifically about the labour mobility bill, that the Premier brought forward yesterday.

I think the reason it's before us, Madam Speaker, is because since May 2019 this government has done an extremely bad job of retaining skilled workers in this province. My colleagues from this side have identified some of those reasons why this government has made retaining Albertans in this province a reality. Albertans are leaving this province because they don't see themselves and the future they want for themselves, and they don't believe that they can achieve that in Alberta. Some of those reasons that people are leaving – and, certainly, I hear about them all the time, people who say that they're gone, they're going to other places – are because of the actions of this government.

Bill 49 is an attempt to attract skilled labour from other parts of Canada and to have the credentials that people achieve in other parts

of Canada, and training and education, reviewed in a timely fashion, but it wouldn't need to be here, I would submit, if this government had done a better job of protecting the very things that we've come to love and know and hold close.

For instance, the significant challenges we have seen over the last year or more with regard to rural health care and the closures of hospital beds, of units, and of people not available to work in those places because they've gone elsewhere, and they've gone elsewhere because this government has chosen to pick fights with huge groups of labour, namely doctors.

We know that there was a significant battle with doctors, that doctors were not having it with regard to the actions this government was taking. We know that nurses, health care workers in general, during this pandemic have been stretched to the limit and that some are choosing to not continue in their profession. Some are choosing to go elsewhere, where the same levels of stress and work are not levied upon them because of the actions of this government. We know that 11,000 of them were . . . [interjection] Yes, sure.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you for letting me intervene. I've heard this a few times tonight about doctors leaving and nurses leaving, so I kind of looked it up just to see if that's real. The data that I have here shows that in 2017, there were 10,680 doctors; in 2018 there were 10,806; in 2019, 10,984; and in 2020, 11,120. Nurses: in June 2019 there were 29,186; 2020, 29,418; and 2021, this is June, 30,933. So that doesn't sound like we've chased them away.

Member Ceci: You know, Madam Speaker, I'm just astounded that the person opposite, the MLA opposite, would imply that there are no issues or problems in our rural hospitals, and people aren't getting the service. We see it in the newspaper every day. We see it because the actions of this government, the actions they're taking to go after workers . . .

Mr. Schow: That's a point of order, Madam Speaker.

10:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika, a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Sure. Thanks for recognizing me, Madam Speaker. I would like to rise on 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." That is not what I heard the member say, that there isn't a problem. I think he simply stated some facts that in this province of Alberta both the numbers of active doctors and nurses have increased year over year. Those are facts. Okay. Now, how that member chooses to interpret those facts is fine, but to regurgitate them to the member who just used them, suggesting a word that he did not say, would be exactly that, imputing false motives.

Madam Speaker, I would encourage that member to apologize for putting words into the mouth of the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright, whom we are honoured to share the Chamber with. This is a point of order.

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, this is absolutely not a point of order, and the member opposite did not actually tell us what he is accusing our member of having said. What I heard was the member opposite quoting registration numbers as if that proved what is actually happening on the ground here in our Alberta hospitals and our rural hospitals, and I heard the Member for Calgary-Buffalo talk about the evidence he's seen in the newspaper. All of this sounds like a

matter of debate, not a point of order, not something that would fall under 23(h), (i), and (j).

In fact, it sounded to me that the Deputy Government House Leader then continued that debate through his point of order rather than allowing the debate to proceed in this House, so I would submit to you that it was not a point of order. We have a difference of opinion and a difference of facts happening in this Chamber, and I would submit to you that it's likely to happen again. We might want to let that continue without interrupting on points of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I'm finding this to be quite an interesting debate here in the House. While not a point of order, I will caution the hon. member in using other members of this House as the actual debate as opposed to the substance at hand. I ask the hon. member to proceed with his remarks.

Debate Continued

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I will continue, and I'll say that we're seeing this bill come before us because there is a net outflow of people from this province. First time in 10 years. That is something that this government is, in the chair, responsible for today, now. We're seeing this bill to try and shore up the problems that they've created. [interjection] No. I'll just continue. Thank you.

I think what should worry Albertans is that the government doesn't seem to learn from this. The government is continuing its actions with regard to other areas as well. So 11,000 health care workers were told at the beginning of the pandemic: we're going to lower your wage; keep working though, work your butt off because we need you. What else were Albertans told? They were told: you're not going to have that curriculum from K to grade 6 that was started; we're going to rip it up; we're going to start again, and you're going to have to like it.

Albertans want the best for their families, Madam Speaker, so they're acting, they're voting with their feet, as it were. Some are leaving this province because they don't like the actions of this government with regard to education, with regard to cutting salaries, with regard to other things. Another really important area is that Albertans are saying: we want better services. This government is saying: no, you don't get those. We want better services around child care in particular. There are six, seven other provinces and territories that have already acted on the federal government money to reduce the costs of child care services for their families, and this government: steadfast in their refusal to move in that direction. So Albertans in that case are voting with their feet again.

With many things, Madam Speaker, we're seeing the need for other people to come here from across the country, and I and everyone in this Chamber will welcome them, but it didn't have to be that way. It didn't have to be that way. It could be changed by the actions of this government, but they are stuck in their ideology about what they think needs to happen in this province instead of looking, talking to stakeholders, to Albertans about what they want. This government is steadfast in their desire to take us back in time, Madam Speaker.

I know that the introduction of this bill is an attempt to conceal the many problems, paper over the many problems that have been created since May 2019 by this government. I wish we would move back in time and we could go forward in a better way, not cut the wages of 11,000 people, not throw out curricula that was developed by numerous, numerous stakeholders who know something about curriculum.

It's not surprising that we're here. I think that we heard earlier that young people are the ones who are taking advantage of going

elsewhere because they don't like the environment. They want better things for themselves, and they're not finding it here in Alberta under this government. It needs to be addressed and redressed, and Bill 49 is an attempt to do that.

I think that as I get into this bill in greater detail myself, with reading it, I'll be able to address more specifics going down the road. The bill, as I understand it, attempts to deal with some of the moderately high-demand occupations, but it's silent in terms of high demand. It deals with moderately high-demand occupations, but the really high-demand occupations aren't covered by the effects of this bill, and those would be around the whole need for construction industry personnel. We need to – we heard earlier about the infrastructure bill that was before us and the need to spend, invest so that we could get our economy going again. Well, some of those specific demanded occupations won't be covered with this bill.

Madam Speaker, I want to now say that I think we could have done a better job in this province . . .

An Hon. Member: Make way.

Member Ceci: . . . had we worked together more collaboratively. [interjection] If this is for an intervention, thank you. I'm going to adjourn debate in a minute, so no thank you.

Mr. McIver: Enjoy the rest of your speech.

Member Ceci: Thank you.

I know that the concerns with this bill – and it was raised by my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre. It does not appear to flow from Alberta's short- and long-term employment forecast, Madam Speaker, or to be designed to address the current labour shortages; for example, the many skilled tradespeople, like construction workers. I brought that up.

Madam Speaker, I think it is time for the end of the evening, and if you would allow it, I would adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think we've all been edified, enriched this evening by tonight's debate, but there's a time and place for all things, and now is the time and place that I will move that we adjourn the Assembly until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning, Wednesday, October 27, 2021.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:29 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders	5697
Second Reading.....	5697
Bill 73 Infrastructure Accountability Act.....	5697
Bill 49 Labour Mobility Act.....	5709

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