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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 2, 2021

Day 122

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Nixon, Jeremy
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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Neudorf
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Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Irwin
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 2, 2021

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, everyone.

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 74

Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate October 28: Mr. Schow]

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join debate on Bill 74, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. Let me be very clear. Our postsecondary sector in Alberta is in real crisis. We have seen time and time again this government continue to cut and slash and burn our postsecondary industries. Nearly \$700 million has been cut from our postsecondary institutions, and we're seeing tuitions rise at, frankly, alarming rates and massive layoffs in our institutions.

To be clear, this will cause long-term and permanent harm to Albertans and to our innovation economy. It's directly contributing to so many people that are choosing to either not come to Alberta or leave Alberta or decide that, when they finish their education, they will no longer remain in Alberta. I think that's something that many of us have heard of, seen. I know I personally have friends who have made the decision. I know I have people who have written me and told me that they're making the decision. I know I've had even researchers reach out and tell me that because of this government's policies they will no longer remain in Alberta. They're looking for new opportunities. They're looking for different institutions. They're looking either across the country or even out of country, even during this pandemic, because, frankly, this government's attack on their research, attack on their institutions is too much. That's something that I'm hearing time and time again.

So, Madam Speaker, it really is time for the government to make some substantive changes in their approach to advanced education. It really is time for the government to reverse its cuts and start repairing the damage they've inflicted on the sector. It's time for the government to actually go out there and make changes that will attract investment, attract innovation, attract talent. We know they're not doing any of this, right? We know they're not doing anything that would create jobs. We know they're not doing anything that would support our research institutions. We know

they're not doing anything that would support the rest of our postsecondary institutions either.

We can see this time and time again because we can see institutions desperate to raise funds because of the massive cuts, desperate to try and find a way to sustain themselves, raising tuition in some cases well over 100 and 200 per cent, right? When you're talking about creating a sustainable postsecondary education system, when you're talking about creating a sustainable innovation ecosystem, what you don't want is an unstable environment where students and researchers are unable to determine what their tuition may look like in just one year. If they're unable to plan even just one year ahead, that means that there's no stability in our postsecondary system.

This bill does nothing to address any of these concerns. This bill does nothing to address how we can actually have a system that would allow Albertans to plan ahead and have a postsecondary education for four, three years, whatever type of program you're in, Madam Speaker. Some programs, of course, we know are shorter; some are longer. Regardless, students are unable to plan even if it was just a two-year program. We know some places grant credentials after two years. Even in just a two-year program we know that students will be unable to plan, and that's how bad the situation has become, right? That's how dramatic it's become, and it's because this government refuses to acknowledge the harms they're causing in our postsecondary education system. I know this bill doesn't do a single thing to restore cuts. It doesn't do a single thing to address the funding problems.

But, Madam Speaker, it's becoming clear to me in the discussions that have happened in this House that the consultations that happened around this bill were completely inadequate as well, and it's becoming clear to me because, despite what government members may be saying, when we talk to stakeholders, when we talk to students' unions, when we talk to institutions, when we talk to administrators, and we talk to researchers, we hear time and time again that the content of the bill is insufficient to address the concerns they've had.

When we look at it, it seems that the most substantive changes are going to be around apprenticeship pay and apprenticeship-mentor ratios. Unfortunately, those details aren't available for improving situations that are not in those fields, and it's something that I think is going to be a problem as we move forward, right? It's going to be a problem that this government does not have a holistic view of postsecondary education, it's going to be a problem that the government does not have a holistic view on what is required to support our postsecondary institutions, and it's going to be a problem that this is the best the government can come up with, right? It's going to be a problem that we spent – well, it's over two years almost into this term now, Madam Speaker, and the government still cannot come up with a single bill that would encourage people to invest in Alberta and encourage people to learn in Alberta and to educate themselves in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I think it's going to be very clear that we need to have some more work done on this bill. I think it's going to be very clear that we're going to need to hear from more stakeholders on this bill. We're going to have to hear from more industry and more people that actually work in these fields and do research in these fields, so at this time I think I do have an amendment I'd like to move.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment REF1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that – sorry. I have to read this in. I would move that the motion for second reading of

Bill 74, Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 74, Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I think that very clearly what I’m proposing here is a common-sense amendment, right? We’re talking about a bill that as it’s written talks about setting up a strategic council to look at postsecondaries beyond 2030 and talks about how we were going to be setting up these systems that will allow them to advise the minister on policies and direction, but none of the details on how the strategic council should work or any of the funding details or the criteria, nothing that’s important, I think, in terms of making sure our institutions are sustainable are going to be in the bill. I think that there’s a strong reason we need to go to committee on this. The strong reason is going to be because we need to have actual postsecondary institutions, actual people who are working in postsecondary institutions, whether that’s in administrative roles or in research roles or in educational roles across the entire industry, engaging on this process, right?

When we’re talking about our polytechnic institutes, for example – we’re talking about NAIT, we’re talking about SAIT, and we’re talking about polytechnics across the entire province – we’re talking about an ecosystem, a group of educators who are really creating our next generation of workers for this province, and in many cases these are very technical and complex jobs, right? We’re talking about people who either need to earn trade certifications or other certifications such as technical certifications in computers or in things like solar installation, whatever it is, Madam Speaker. When we look at these roles, we know that there’s a large place for these postsecondaries and polytechnics to play in our economy.

What we do see is that this government continues to cut and slash and burn these institutions, right? We see that time and time again. We know that right now almost \$700 million has been cut from postsecondary institutions. We know that hundreds of millions of dollars have been cut from postsecondary institutions. We know that tuition is massively rising. We’re seeing layoffs across almost every institution. Indeed, some institutions such as Athabasca University are being forced to close their doors. There’s not even going to be a building in Athabasca anymore, right?

10:10

Madam Speaker, when we see this happen time and time again, it becomes abundantly clear that this government is simply not taking the steps that are required and not listening to the stakeholders on how to have the industry act in a meaningful way to prepare Albertans for our future economy, and I think that’s something very concerning, right? I think it’s something that everybody should be worried about in this place because we’re talking about the people who are – and we’re not talking about far-off timelines. We’re not talking about people who are going to be working in our economy in 10 or 15 years; we’re talking about people who are going to be entering our workforce in a year or in two years. We’re talking about people who are currently in our postsecondary systems, who are currently doing research in our postsecondary institutions, who are currently trying to innovate in our postsecondary institutions and are receiving nearly no support from this government. These are the people that need to be at the table, right? These are the Albertans that we need to listen to.

I know this government has a problem listening to Albertans. I know this government has a problem engaging with Albertans. I

know this government likes to put in their earplugs and not listen to Albertans, and that’s unfortunate, Madam Speaker. But I think that if we were to go to committee, if we were able to have a proper consultation process, if we were able to set up a proper framework at Alberta’s Economic Future Committee, we would be able to have those conversations, and the government would frankly be forced to listen, right? The government would be forced to sit there and have Albertans tell them what they’re doing wrong.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you that Albertans have a lot to say about what this government is doing wrong, but specifically when we look at postsecondary, specifically when we look at our advanced education institutions, we know that the continued slash and burn, the continued degradation of our advanced education infrastructure, whether that’s in delaying paying for deferred maintenance, whether that’s in the direct cuts – there’s so much going on in our institutions that Albertans deserve to have their voice at the table, right? They deserve to be able to come to committee. They deserve to be able to actually engage with their elected officials instead of, as we’ve seen with various media reports, the government basically ignoring thousands of e-mails from so many different topics. We know that the government continues to do this.

But that’s why I think that this House should tell the government that they have to go to committee, that they have to listen, that they have to stop, slow down this bill, and actually get it right. They have to actually engage with their constituents. They have to actually engage with the stakeholders and do proper consultation. Madam Speaker, that’s, of course, the power this House has, but it’s something that I think would send a very strong message to the government. It would send a very strong message that this is something this House believes in, that every single MLA here, whether you’re an opposition MLA or a government backbencher – maybe you’re one of the half of caucus who’s been passed over for cabinet time and time again. You can send a message to your cabinet right now. You can send a message to them and say that you believe in consultation, that you believe in engaging with your constituents, that you believe in engaging with Albertans.

Madam Speaker, if I was one of the members who was passed over, one of the half of the UCP caucus, give or take, that’s been passed over for cabinet time and time again or removed from cabinet without any reason given and no thanks given in a press conference, if I was one of those people who was removed from cabinet, maybe I would be upset as well. Unfortunately, it looks like they’re complicit. They’re willing to sit down and support this Premier. They’re willing to sit down and support this UCP government, and that’s really unfortunate.

I think it’s unfortunate because we know right now, Madam Speaker, that this government’s lack of consultation, lack of engagement on bills just like this, where they won’t engage with the advanced education stakeholders, where they won’t engage with Albertans, is why this government has frankly disillusioned so many Albertans, why so few people support this government, why I receive thousands of e-mails every single day about how angry they are with this government.

It is, frankly, shocking that the government members and government backbenchers would not support more consultation, right? We saw them on the opposite side, when they were in opposition, spend hours and hours and hours talking about how important it was to consult, how important it was to engage, how important it was to have that discussion, and now that they’re sitting on the government benches, Madam Speaker, it appears that none of that applies anymore. Now that they’re supporting this UCP Premier, none of that applies anymore. They don’t have to listen, they don’t think it’s important to engage with Albertans, they don’t

think it's important that Albertans have their say, and that's just a pattern with this government, right? That's just the behaviour that Albertans have become used to with this government, and I think it's very disappointing. I think Albertans are disappointed, and I think they're going to reflect that when we see Albertans go to the polls.

Unfortunately, I think the government has a chance to turn that around, right? The government has a chance to change that. Backbenchers specifically have a chance to change that. They can tell their Premier, they can tell their cabinet what they think. They can tell them that they believe engagement is important. They can tell them they believe that this bill does not have enough details, does not have the specifics, does not address rising tuition, does not address massive layoffs in postsecondary, does not address the permanent harm that's being done in so many constituencies across the province. I know that basically every single person in this place will have a constituent who's been trying to attend or is currently attending one of these postsecondary institutions.

Madam Speaker, those are the Albertans we should be talking about and talking to right now, and instead of doing that, we see that basically half the UCP caucus – the half that aren't in cabinet have either been removed or were passed over for cabinet – those members continue to support this government that will not engage with Albertans. That is the reason that those members need to have a real hard look in the mirror and realize that we need to start talking with the people. We need to start listening to Albertans. We need to start listening to the people who sent us to this place, start listening to the people who actually have stakes in our jobs, of course, but in their education as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I would have helped you with that one, but there was very little time left in the hon. member's speech. However, the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne was the first one to stand and will be recognized to speak.

Mr. Getson: I was actually looking to have an intervention, but that didn't quite work out. Maybe one day the opposition will cede their time and see if we can try this new item out. They like to fire a lot of shots across the bow but not necessarily allow any response or fulsome debate in here other than a pontification stump speech that's going to be tweeted out as we speak over to the many followers.

The member brings some items up that I would like to address in regard to consultation and where we got to on one part of this bill. Now, if you're looking at this bill in singularity, there might be some concerns. Madam Speaker, if the member had shown up and paid attention while we were talking about the skilled trades task force over the last two years, and I'm going to rattle through again, probably – and if *Hansard* could check this or anybody else – for about the 10th time, talking about what took place to do the consultation, come up with some of the recommendations.

Some of the members on this. Glenn Feltham was the co-chair, former president and CEO of Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. We had David Ross, co-chair, president and CEO of Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. We had the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, a young skilled tradesperson herself; Brad Bagnall, instructor, Trades Centre of Excellence, Bowness high school; j'Amey Bevan, the chair of the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board; Stuart Cullum, president of Olds College; Ann Everatt, president and CEO of Northern Lakes College; myself; Laura Jo Gunter, president and CEO of Bow Valley College; Paul Heyens, CEO of Alberta Glass; Dave King, School of Trades and Technology, Lakeland College; Ray Massey, president, Skills Canada; Andy Neigel, president and CEO of

Careers: the Next Generation; Terry O'Flynn, president and founding partner, Prism Flow Products Inc.; Terry Parker – this one the member should really pay attention to; it's almost as exciting as his fixation on Cheezies the last couple of weeks – executive director, Building Trades of Alberta; Dennis Perrin, Alberta and prairies director, Christian Labour Association of Canada; Amanda Rosychuk, senior vice-president, drainage services, EPCOR and also from Women Building Futures; Tony Tomkiewych, provincial apprenticeship committee, industrial, millwright; Paul Verhesen, president and CEO, Clark Builders; Colin Ward, chief operating officer, Ward Bros. Construction; Jason Wright, director, education and apprenticeship, sheet metal workers' local 8 and president, Building Trades of Alberta Training Society. Isn't that a mouthful?

Now, this group went out and we consulted. We brought people in from industry. It was over a year and a half, basically, because it was interrupted by COVID. We talked about all the items that the member was bringing up, about consultation and dealing with trades, even parents, students, different directors in these universities, looking at how we could expand outside of our present model, looking to other jurisdictions throughout the world, the best practices, if you would. Malaysia came to the table. We had some Asian models, we had a British model, we had a Germanic model, and we looked into Switzerland, just to name a few.

Again, Madam Speaker, being cognizant of the time and how many times we've spoken about this . . .

The Deputy Speaker: You've got lots of time, Member.

Mr. Getson: This is what we did: true consultation, talking to people in all facets, in all areas, not just a microscope fixated on one group, that the member seems to talk about all the time.

Now, I'm sure the member – this might jog his memory – and I'm sure other folks would like to speak to it. But I really do want to suggest that consultation has taken place. There are a couple of items on the main bill that we want to talk about perhaps, to get more clarification on, and I would be happy to get to the main bill to do that. So I would highly recommend to the rest of the members in here today that we vote down the amendment. We don't have to go back to committee. Let's try to get the things happening that this board, where the recommendation is coming from, the skilled trades task force, actually made based on all of that consultation up to this point, so we can get the ball moving forward, get Albertans back to work, tweak where we need to so we can be very competitive in the jurisdictions and support a very fulsome and diverse economy of where our future is for ourselves and for our kids.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

10:20

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate. We're speaking to the referral motion, REF1, that this Bill 74, Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting the words after "that" and be "not read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2." I'd like to speak in favour of this amendment and just encourage all of my colleagues in this House to also vote in favour of it.

It's very timely. You know, I had the opportunity to meet with the University of Alberta's student executive. I met with the president and the vice-president external just last week, and certainly Bill 74 was top of mind for those students, especially because, of course, we know that Budget 2021-22 was really

targeted so strongly at the University of Alberta, which, I'll just share with the House once again, is in the riding that I represent and is my alma mater from – I think we established that before – 40 years ago. I've had two of my three sons attend the University of Alberta. One is still currently in school there, in his third year. So it certainly is heartbreaking to see what the UCP government is doing to attack specifically the University of Alberta. They are bearing 50 per cent of the cuts for the postsecondary education system across Alberta. It's about \$126 million that is being cut in this year's budget, and \$60 million is at the University of Alberta.

The University of Alberta has about 25 per cent of the students in the province, yet they have to bear the brunt of 50 per cent of the cost. Madam Speaker, I must tell you that this is devastating for the university, it's devastating for the students and the programs, and it's devastating for the professors, for the staff that support both students and professors at the university. We know that since the UCP government was elected – this is in the whole of postsecondary – 1,500 full-time equivalent staff have been laid off. Almost \$700 million has been cut from the Advanced Education budget. These are very substantial numbers, and of course it's creating a very negative impact in our postsecondary institutions. Certainly, the U of A, as I've already articulated, has experienced a significant hit, you know, more than really is fair. Certainly, it's important for that to be on the record.

Having met with the students, I could hear clearly their concerns about Bill 74, and I would say that absolutely they would be grateful to have this bill not read a second time and moved to committee because there's so much that's missing. There's so much that needs to be shifted, and a lot of what is before us today is not being addressed. The students would like to say so much more. [interjection] Go ahead.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. I haven't had a chance to meet with students recently. I mean, it's certainly been a lot more difficult during COVID, but I'm really interested to hear a lot more. The member opposite talked at length about how they consult regularly, which is not what we see in most cases, so I'm just wondering if you could just expand on what the students are saying, if they feel consulted, and what their primary concerns were, because I think their voices are very important voices in this debate.

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. Thank you very much to the Member for St. Albert. Certainly, the president of the University of Alberta student council is Rowan Ley, and the vice-president external is Christian Fotang. Both of them were, you know, very specific about the concerns that they had regarding the legislation and just the key issues that are happening at the University of Alberta. Also, I just wanted to mention that Rowan Ley is also the president of CAUS, which is the college and university association of Alberta. That covers all of the institutions, so he's in a very key role. He not only understands what's happening at U of A; he also understands what's happening across this sector. So his analysis is extremely important.

Certainly, one of the major issues that the U of A is concerned about is just the exceptional tuition increase. It's really, you know, gobsmacking, I would say, sort of jaw-dropping, how much these exceptional tuition increases are going to impact the students. It's not sort of that cap of 7 per cent. These are faculties that got an exceptional tuition increase, and there are several of them; for example, the bachelor of commerce, 22 per cent; the bachelor of science in engineering is 24.5 per cent; the bachelor of science in medical laboratory science is 17 per cent; law is 29 per cent; pharmacy is 44 per cent. This tops it off: the master's in counselling psychology is going up 100 per cent.

These are devastating numbers. This is really hitting people who are so vulnerable. They're, you know, young folks generally, not always. Some of them are going back to school at a later age. Regardless, to have a hit of that significant an increase in a short period of time, I would think that some people would have to have either gigantic student loans, that they'll have the burden of having to pay off for years to come, or feeling like they just can't shoulder that burden. What should we be doing in Alberta? We should be supporting young people, supporting people who want to advance their education, not making it harder and harder for them. Another one that's sort of, you know, gobsmacking is the MBA. It's 71 per cent, a bit more than 71 per cent, the tuition increase. These are devastating to students.

I mean, you know, these issues around tuition increases, the decision of the UCP government to really pull out of this sector in terms of the support that's so important – and we know so many reasons for us to support the postsecondary education sector. [interjection] Okay.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Sorry. I don't mean to interrupt you, but I wanted to hear more. Actually, you know, you're describing some really significant barriers to education, like, huge barriers to education, which I think is really quite interesting when you look at the preamble to Bill 74. It really talks about making postsecondary education accessible to all regardless of location and addressing barriers. You're the mom of three sons, two of which have attended or are attending university. You yourself have done that as a single parent, putting students through postsecondary. I'm wondering if you can talk or expand on these barriers and, truly, how they do really link to the concerns about mental health that we hear time and again from postsecondary students.

Thank you.

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. Thank you very much to the Member for St. Albert for that important question. You know, as I've already articulated, going through all those different faculties, the very significant increases mean that people can't fulfill their dreams. Isn't that what we as government should be doing? We should be supporting young people to be able to educate themselves and follow the career paths that they want to, but this will make people pause because it is so significant. And I would say that the average Albertan can't shoulder it, or it will have very negative consequences for years to come with being burdened by student debt.

10:30

You know, certainly, I'm talking about the students already sort of at school, but what about ones who are looking in and wanting to explore it? I'm sure that many will say, "I'm not going to do that," and that will mean perhaps they can't realize their potential, that they can't fulfill on their dreams because the fees are so significant. We all know that when we can follow our dreams, when we can have choice in our world, that really is very important for our well-being, for our family's well-being, everyone's well-being. If we feel confined, if we feel like it's hopeless, that we can't do that, that that's going to be too hard, the burden of the cost of it, the consequences can be devastating to people.

This is, you know, besides this significant, exceptional increase in these faculties that I'm talking about. That was the second point that both the president and the vice-president of the University of Alberta student council talked about, just the significant challenges to mental health that students are experiencing. They had quite a few specifics about what was needed.

You know, they talk about how the University of Lethbridge was granted \$147 per FLE – they call it a full-load equivalent – back

some time ago. They were able to drastically reduce their wait-lists for people wanting to access support for their mental health, so being able to talk with a counsellor, have help navigating resources. Oftentimes when you're experiencing something that's some kind of a mental health episode, you're overwhelmed. You don't know where to turn. You don't know what to do. Having people to support students to be able to navigate the systems and get that support, get that grounding that they need can really put them on strong footing again, but if those resources are not available, then people may go down pathways that are not supportive, and then they can spiral into deeper depression, anxiety. We know that they will self-medicate sometimes with addiction behaviours.

These are generally fairly young people who are, you know, stepping out into the world, trying to develop themselves as people, and still there are a few steps forward, a few steps back. At that specific time, if we as a society, as a government can really be responsible and support people to have positive mental health, the benefits will be 100-fold. We will be supporting people to establish themselves in their academic studies and move on to a career and be able to then be contributing members of our society. If they get taken out, if they get overwhelmed and there's no one there for them, then it means that that could be a liability. [interjection] For sure.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. You know, that is quite fascinating. I just wanted to . . . [interjection] I'm glad you find that entertaining. One of the things I wanted to ask the member. You know, I know that when I read this piece of legislation and heard from the minister, I was actually quite disappointed that this piece of legislation – I think every piece of legislation deserves our time to go through and to understand, and I was disappointed at just how far it didn't go, considering we spent \$3.7 million on a report, Alberta 2030, that outlines six pillars. Then you look at this legislation, and the pieces don't really align. I think what you're describing about poverty and mental health and how much more difficult it is for people to access postsecondary education sort of flies in the face of the Alberta 2030 report.

I'm wondering if the member can just expand on – I know I'm actually disappointed by this legislation.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much to the Member for St. Albert for, you know, those questions. Certainly, yeah, the document that the Minister of Advanced Education has talked about extensively regarding this Alberta 2030 plan – and I did speak about this earlier in my remarks. I mean, I understand Bill 74 is sort of foundational to that document, yet that document is very narrow, really, in its scope and focus. I question whether it is a visionary document because it talks quite narrowly about what postsecondary is about. Postsecondary is about much more than just getting a job. Postsecondary is about creating citizenship, developing ourselves as humans on the planet. It's not just about getting a job. That's totally the title of the document, that it just talks about jobs. It's not a very visionary document, and we also know that it cost an extraordinary amount of money. Whether that money was well spent, I question for sure.

I'd like to just continue to talk a little bit more about mental health because this was a really key focus of the students when I spoke to them. As I was saying, the University of Lethbridge was really able to cut their wait-list when they received about \$147. Based on sort of cost-of-living increases over the years, the students have calculated that if they received now \$165 per full-load equivalent for students, that would really make a significant difference to be able to support students' mental health. That is an important ask that the students have for the minister.

Of course, it seems to not be something that this bill addresses or, you know, puts any funding behind. That is very disappointing because I think that is a significant need in this community. I mean, students are learning in postsecondary in a time of COVID. I know that for the last two years – I mean, this year they're back in the classrooms, most of them. I think there still is a little bit of online learning sometimes. I know that the U of A did suspend classes and only had online learning already this fall due to the fourth wave of COVID. It's challenging. I know that many students found that hard, to kind of be at home 24/7. That impacts people's mental health also because they don't have that interaction. We're all social creatures, and we want to be connected with people. Certainly, that's part of the university experience, being connected with fellow students.

I guess what I'm trying to articulate here is that there has been significant stress on students. There have been huge issues because of COVID now with this extraordinary increase in tuition, besides the regular stresses of, you know, trying to feel out, like: what does my professor want from me? What are the demands of the course load that I'm taking? Maybe I'm living alone for the first time or living away from the home that I grew up in. These are all things that students have to manage and deal with, and sometimes they need supports. I think it's really incumbent on the government to make sure that those supports are available for them. I just really encourage the Minister of Advanced Education to please invest in that area. That's an important part of support for students when they are going to university.

I guess I just really want to make it clear that the U of A has really done significant work to be respectful of the UCP government's demand for them to cut back. They have, you know, really done extraordinary things in terms of reorganization. They have this plan where they are grouping now 13 of their faculties into three colleges. They have decreased administrative costs, with total savings of \$95 million. They have changed procurement processes and are rethinking the use of space to create an additional \$32 million in savings. These aren't small things. I mean, I can just read them off easily, but these aren't small things. These are huge changes the U of A has made to be respectful of the demands of this UCP government. But yet again this year they asked them to do more.

10:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm really grateful to stand and speak against the amendment to Bill 74, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. The reason I'm opposed to this amendment is that it's not a substantive amendment. It's really a procedural game.

Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity, actually, to meet with the Alberta Students' Executive Council yesterday evening. They had a social, and they invited me, and I attended. They're meeting with a number of government representatives, I know, throughout this week. I asked those student leaders – and in attendance was the student president from Red Deer Polytechnic – about how things were going and what their impressions were during this year. I have a great concern and, frankly, a great love for our young adults who are attending postsecondary schooling.

I know, for myself, I have been greatly blessed by an intentional education. As a father of two young adults myself, with COVID and some of the things that they've been asked to sacrifice, I want to see our young adults have the same opportunities that those of us in the Legislature enjoyed. I appreciate the discussion by the member

opposite about mental health. One of the comments that was made to me by one of the student leaders is that a job is the best social program. That's true, actually. These young adults are attending postsecondary education to pursue their passion, to seek happiness as they individually see fit, and the best thing that we can do as a government is to provide them with opportunity and a strong economy so that when they do graduate, they have those opportunities.

I'm grateful that building skills for jobs has that focus. One of the motivating forces for me to run was that I really wanted to make sure that the public was at the heart of all of our government programs and services. As it relates to education, then, my deep desire is to see the students kept at the heart of our education system. I do believe that the status quo can be better, and I'm grateful for the effort of the minister to try and improve from the status quo to give students an intentional education, the skills and knowledge that will allow them to seek happiness as they individually see fit, to live where they want to live, to raise their families, and to seek happiness as they individually see fit.

Now, speaking a little bit on specifics, of course, in my particular constituency, Red Deer Polytechnic is there, and at the time when I was a young man, I attended – it was Red Deer college at the time – and I loved my education at Red Deer college. Not only did I appreciate the small classroom settings, the personalized education, the great teachers and peers that I was able to meet, but the value of that education is such a great investment . . . [interjection] Sorry.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just intervening for my colleague from Red Deer-South. I'm just wondering, if he would go back to talking with the students last night, if he happened to talk about Alberta 2030 and that extensive consultation. We've heard from members opposite that we should do more, yet yesterday during debate they were talking at length about how we've done too much and that we do too many things: enough time for talk; start the actions. I just wonder if he would share a little bit about that consultation that we did, Alberta 2030, as well as his experience talking to those students about that if he would.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. I'd be happy to do that. I didn't have a specific agenda when I went and met with these students. I just like young adults. Maybe it's because I'm getting a little bit older and being around young adults helps me feel younger. I appreciate some of my colleagues in this House, you know, who are youthful and help inspire me to try to have more energy. There are some energetic people among the members opposite, for sure. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-South. He inspires me with his energy. He's very energetic when he is speaking, and I appreciate his energy and enthusiasm.

I do deeply care about our young people, and I did ask them in the course of our discussions because I just wanted to have an honest and frank discussion about how things were going for them. In the course of our discussions Alberta 2030 did come up. There are many aspects of 2030 which they agree with. Speaking specifically as it relates to Red Deer Polytechnic and the president, the student leaders at Red Deer Polytechnic are very supportive of Red Deer college transitioning to become Red Deer Polytechnic, more so, Madam Speaker, than they were as it relates to Red Deer university. I want to talk about why that would be the case. Why would that be the case?

I must confess, Madam Speaker, that when I first became an MLA, because I do deeply care about Red Deer college – not only did I attend there; I actually volunteered and taught there. I taught

their taxation course at the Donald School of Business there, which is named after Jack Donald, who is the founder of Fas Gas, just a great example of a local Alberta entrepreneur who gave generously back to our community. Of course, I've donated there over the years, and I just really want to see our institution be the best it can be. [interjection] Yeah. Sorry.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you.

Mr. Stephan: I digressed a bit. Sorry about that.

Mr. Neudorf: That's all right.

I do want to hear about that transition of Red Deer college becoming a polytechnic as Lethbridge College is also seeking that transition right now, and I believe we could learn a lot from you in that transition. I'd like to hear more about how the students benefit and appreciate that advancement. Anything that I can learn from you to take back that we could possibly see happen for Lethbridge College as well, I think, benefits students across the province. Again, it just shows the member's dedication to his constituency, taking their needs forward and helping students actually get the education that they need so that they can be successful in their careers as they graduate and move on in their lives, which is exactly what I believe we're trying to do with this legislation. If the member would share that experience, that would be great.

Mr. Stephan: Actually, I'd be very happy to do that. Coincidentally, when I attended this social last night, I sat across from the student president at Lethbridge College and had an opportunity to talk to her about why I was excited about the opportunity that Red Deer Polytechnic had and how it supported them. The reason why the students at Red Deer Polytechnic supported that change is because in central Alberta we have a really strong trades and technology program. Madam Speaker, actually, my son attended the apprenticeship to become an electrician at Red Deer Polytechnic and received a great education there and had a great experience.

10:50

Under our model, if you look at U of C and U of A and U of L, which are great institutions, absolutely, these are great public universities in our province, but those particular institutions don't have trades training whereas institutions like NAIT and SAIT – incidentally, as I was meeting with the student leaders yesterday, I learned something that I wasn't aware of; that is, that NAIT and SAIT, between the two of them, graduate about 25 per cent of all of the trades graduates in the entire country. If that's true, that surprised me. That speaks to a few things: first of all, the entrepreneurial spirit of industry in our province and the opportunities that we do provide for our young adults who come from throughout the country and, frankly, throughout the world for opportunity to seek and pursue their dreams.

As it relates to Red Deer Polytechnic, we have a strong trades program. I know, for myself, that it's important to be good at – I would prefer to be good at fewer things but do them really well than try to do a whole bunch of things and not be very good at them. As it relates to Red Deer college, in my honest view, Red Deer will be a much better polytechnic that is unique and special, more so than it would be as a university. It's really important that we play to our strengths. That's how it is in the real world.

Madam Speaker, I know that there are many things that I am not very good at. I know that. My good wife helps me understand that and observe that sometimes, and I'm grateful for that; so are my children sometimes. I know that to succeed in life, it's really important that we understand what we're good at and what we're not. Certainly, you know, in the real world I'm not very good at

fixing things. Actually, my adult sons are quite good at fixing things. It's important to appreciate your strengths and weaknesses.

The polytechnic status for Red Deer allows it to become something that is unique and special. The great thing about a polytechnic is that it gives Red Deer the autonomy to offer more applied degrees, just like NAIT and SAIT. [interjection] Yeah. I see an intervention.

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you to the member from Red Deer. Again, you just struck on a chord here. There are two parts. We are speaking to an amendment. Even with all this fulsome conversation that we've had, even though we've consulted, I really appreciate the fact that you're seeing the same thing in your areas. I've been reached out to as well by folks from the U of A and otherwise. It's usually that slant, and it's understanding that the polytechnical, the trades, and universities aren't competitive; they're actually complementary to each other. You kind of struck a chord on there, recognizing that each one's skills and attributes are actually complementary. Maybe you can expand on that, on how these integrate together in the real world.

The other item that you struck on was understanding our strengths, working to our strengths. Rather than trying to be all for everything, be very proficient at what you have and build on those strengths. If you could expand on that, please, sir.

Mr. Stephan: I thank you for that question. Over the years of practice as a tax lawyer, you know, I have received a great intentional education, but I don't think any less of the trades at all than of my formal education. Madam Speaker, I had the privilege to work with so many great men and women in central Alberta, from all walks of life, that pursued their passion and were really successful, creating jobs and providing goods and services that the public valued. Some of these individuals didn't have a formal education; some did. Some had a trades background; some did not.

One of the things that really attracted me, Madam Speaker – I worked for a period of time as a tax lawyer in downtown Calgary, but I would go and visit my home where I grew up as a young man in Red Deer, and I would see all these great local businesses. I really admire and appreciate entrepreneurs who make something out of nothing, who create goods and services that are valued and create jobs and livelihoods for families in our community. I have such a great admiration for that.

In the Red Deer area we have a fairly diversified economy. We have, of course, oil and gas services and production. We have a strong agricultural sector. We have tourism and growth in terms of construction like many areas of Alberta. I feel central Alberta is a very special place. We have a wonderful location in the dynamic Edmonton-Calgary corridor, and I really consider some unique advantages to central Alberta. I appreciate that throughout the province, be it some of our larger centres or some of our other centres, there are unique competitive advantages for everywhere.

What makes where we live and where we serve are the great families and individuals that we try and serve in it. That's actually more important than geography, the people that we are able to serve. As it relates to Red Deer and central Alberta, we do have a strong concentration of individuals who are skilled tradespeople, and with that skilled trades population, there are many jobs and businesses that do demand that. The polytechnic focus of Red Deer college allows us to support the local economy better.

The other neat thing, though, with polytechnic status is that, yes, we do get to grant degrees. I know that Red Deer Polytechnic has some of its own degrees that aren't in collaboration with other institutions but independent, stand-alone degrees. I know that they also have an application in for a commerce degree so that business

students, unlike myself, who started their education are able to complete that in their local community and then get hired by local businesses to live and work and to contribute to the economy that they want to call home. Polytechnic status as it relates to Red Deer college complements its competencies and strengths with a focus of providing its students with practical knowledge and experience, employable skills.

Madam Speaker, one of the reasons I was motivated to run is that the NDP – you know, I don't think everything the NDP did was bad. I never want to be categorical, but one thing that they didn't do well is that they didn't create jobs. The private sector underwent and lost tens of thousands of private-sector jobs from when they started their term in office to when they finished. That, to me, is the worst thing that we can actually do for our young adults. They work so hard to get their education, to pursue their passion, and it would be very disappointing to work so hard and then not to have a job in your desired profession. Government can't completely right all of that – no government can – but I do feel that our policies and indeed Alberta 2030, by providing a focus on marketable skills and knowledge that will allow for more employment demand, is moving in the right direction.

I know that there was extensive consultation. I know that the student leaders that I met with generally support the 2030 vision, which this legislation is in furtherance of. I know that as it relates specifically to being a polytechnic in terms of that focus on skills for jobs, it will bless my community and, most importantly, the students who are going to school.

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

11:00

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance this morning to rejoin the conversation around Bill 74 and, of course, the referral amendment to committee here. I've listened intently, and of course I've noticed that this morning we seem to be spending a lot of time around consultation, so I find myself in a rather familiar position, as I've found throughout the course of the 30th Legislature, and again I'll end up issuing a challenge to members of the government and members of the government caucus, like I've done in the past. I'll get to that in a moment as to why that's important.

When I'm thinking about what I've heard this morning around consultation – and, you know, I do appreciate the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland for trying to list off some of the people. I remember being in that exact – not quite the exact same position. I was, like, I think, a chair over from you doing that. But, as you'll remember, Madam Speaker, having served in the 29th Legislature as well along with me, at the time the members of the opposition were very, very adamant that they wanted to see the list of people that were consulted with every single time. Well, who did you consult with on this bill? We want to see that list. Why don't you table it?

Here's that challenge. Are we going to see that list? I remember, again, standing up almost in that same spot and spending at least two-thirds of my time, and I only remember going through – it was, like, half the list, and I was hitting all the high levels of groups and organizations that represented a significant amount of Albertans, but that wasn't good enough. It wasn't good enough. They still wanted to see the list, and then on top of that it was: well, you didn't consult with these guys and those guys and those persons and everything like that. So the challenge is that perhaps maybe we'll see a member of the government or a member of the government caucus table that entire list of who was consulted with on Bill 74.

One of the things that I noticed that you kind of didn't highlight at the time, which was very conspicuously missing, was students.

You know, listening to the Member for Red Deer-South talking about getting a chance to visit with students at the time, the problem is that they were meeting this week or even last week, and I'm kind of wondering. The bill is already before us. So it is kind of like consultations after the fact, which seems to be a bit of a challenge for me. Why didn't you consult before that? [interjection] Maybe I'll give way here and give the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland a chance to perhaps maybe explain why it seems students were missing from that list.

Mr. Getson: Madam Speaker, hell has not frozen over. I stand corrected. This intervention thing might work with some of the members across the aisle, and I absolutely appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Decore for doing this. Even when he gives me heck in the media, he still calls me a freedom fighter, so I still take that as a compliment any day of the week.

Specifically with Bill 74 the member is correct in the sense that nothing has been tabled to date when it came to student consultations, but when I had spoken before, it was in the broader context of this is only one part of a bunch of the items that were brought forward. What I can do is that I'll commit – and I can't tell you when because it'll take me a little time to do it, as you understand, from this side – to pull together the task force of the students that we have engaged with and that I personally engaged with about the greater and broader context. Obviously, you know full well that I can't make commitments for a minister. Hopefully, that works.

Again, Member for Edmonton-Decore, thank you for letting me do an intervention and lose a bet.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder on interventions. You still are to speak through the chair.

Mr. Getson: Oh, I apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I guess I would hope that I will never ever be accused of not being fair. Don't get too excited. I mean, I don't know if I'll do that on a regular basis, but we'll see.

What I am hoping to see, though, you know, should we get to see a list of who was consulted with, hopefully, it might have been some of maybe the students that call Edmonton-Decore home. As I've mentioned before, I have all three of the high schools in north Edmonton north of the Yellowhead freeway, so the concerns that I've heard from them about being able to actually attend postsecondary are an actual significant concern for those students. As I mentioned, even in my own journey when I attended NAIT, had it not been for the athletic scholarship that I qualified for and getting a chance to play basketball for NAIT, it might have been a challenge for me to be able to attend school even with a student loan.

My friend from earlier was talking about some of the programs that had increased in tuition. Those are some significant tuition increases which I think will pose a very significant barrier, at least for some of the students who are looking to attend postsecondary education who call Edmonton-Decore home. You know, I have noticed that when we table bills in this House, they sometimes proceed rather quickly, and the problem is that after the fact, once you've consulted, even though you've heard from them, the bill is already here, we don't see any changes, and those poor students are still going to be in the exact same boat. They're not going to be able to afford to attend postsecondary education.

By stopping the process for a moment or pausing, we get a chance to send this to committee. Maybe we can actually bring those

students in so that we can hear from them directly. [interjection] I'm happy to give way to my friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you to my friend from Edmonton-Decore. He raised an important issue that I think needs to be highlighted because we've heard time and again how much tuition has increased, and I think the Member for Edmonton-Decore is correct in raising the concerns that he's hearing from students in his constituency about the cost of going to school.

There is also the other piece of student supports. You know, I've certainly heard from constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar that they find the system of student supports very confusing, very difficult to navigate, and there just isn't enough money there to help them achieve their dreams of going to university. I'm wondering if my friend from Edmonton-Decore has heard something similar and if perhaps he would be interested in having the committee dig into these issues of financial supports for students in his constituency.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Thanks, Madam Speaker. That is actually a very significant concern and not only just for upcoming students – as I said, getting a chance to speak with high school students, they're getting ready to look at the future – but even for people that are going back to school. I've mentioned earlier in debate speaking to a single mom who, when she found out about \$25-a-day child care, cried because she actually believed that now she'll be able to go back to postsecondary education, get some schooling, and improve the lives for her and her children. She was a little concerned. She thought it was going to be tough but that child care was going to make the difference.

Now that we've seen that taken away – and we don't know when we may see a child care program that will make that kind of difference – if we actually get the chance to send Bill 74 to committee through the amendment, I think we'll get a chance to invite these kinds of individuals to present to the committee or to submit to a committee their thoughts around how some of these changes that we've seen up to this point are negatively impacting postsecondary education.

You know, \$700 million plus in cuts is not a small number. We've seen how postsecondary staff have been laid off. So now you have the challenge of possibly not being able to afford to go with rising tuition costs and rising student loan interest rates going up. Will staff even be there to be able to train them in their chosen field of endeavours? You start to combine all of these things. This is actually putting up significant barriers to people being able to attend postsecondary education.

We add things like, for instance, the elimination of STEP. Again, that was one avenue that I know throughout the years has been very, very well used as an avenue for students to be able to get that education.

11:10

I guess by pressing the pause button – nobody is saying that, you know, this shouldn't be enacted. But at the very least – the very least – we need to hear from the students that will be directly affected by this bill. There's only so much an MLA can talk to people. I understand that. We're all in different parts of the province. I have direct access to the students in Edmonton-Decore, maybe a little bit more surrounding besides that, but I don't have access to the rest of the province as easily as I do in Edmonton-Decore. This committee gives me that opportunity. [interjection] I'm happy to give way.

Mr. Schmidt: I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Decore for recognizing this intervention. I just want to underline the point

that he is trying to make. I think he's identified a significant weakness in the consultation processes that the Advanced Education ministry has undertaken in the past. I will admit that even when I was in the minister's position in that ministry, we didn't take this into consideration very well either, but it's hearing from potential students about what the barriers are that they face, right?

One of the mistakes that Advanced Education makes is that they talk to the students who are already in the system about what they need to be able to continue on with their studies. The Advanced Education ministry doesn't do a very good job of talking to potential students and hearing from those who have decided already, before they even graduate from high school, that they aren't going to university or college and understanding what drives that decision. I really want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Decore for that important point.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Thanks to my friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar for pointing that out. It at least lets me know that what I'm hearing from, you know, the students-to-be in postsecondary education and the challenges that they're facing is not just in my area. It's in others, and I think we need to take that very, very seriously. These are our future emerging leaders. These are the ones that are going to be coming up from behind to replace all of us in leadership positions. Would it not make sense to be able to at least set things up somewhat in the direction that they want to see it go?

One of the other things I did want to point out before my time ends here with this amendment: it would also be a very good chance for us to be able to explore this minister's advisory council on higher education and skills. I had some concerns around some of the language that I saw within the bill, and this will give us the opportunity to be able to dig into this a little bit further. I did hear the Minister of Advanced Education talking about wanting to provide more autonomy to postsecondary institutions to be able to make decisions that best fit their institutions, and on the surface that sounds good.

It's not that I'm necessarily against this advisory council. You know, the student advisory council to the Minister of Education: I remember some of my students from Edmonton-Decore sitting on that. What an incredible experience and opportunity not only for them but for us to be able to hear from those up-and-coming students. My gosh, I mean, one of my students from a junior high sat on that committee. It's just absolutely amazing.

By sending it to committee, we'll get a chance to look at this, because the language that I'm seeing presented here within the bill has some challenges. You know, as I've mentioned, on page 13 under powers and duties, 107.02(1) and (2), those two paragraphs are actually conflicting with each other. I don't know if that was a mistake. Is that intentional to try to make it confusing? Again, as I've always said, when we're crafting language here in this Assembly, it's not for us. It's never for us. We understand what supposedly is going to be happening or what's supposed to happen. It's for the people who are coming after us who might not have access to us to be able to ask. Can they read this clearly and understand what it means as we understand it right now? Those two are conflicting.

As I mentioned, when we get to sub (3) and we talk about, you know, the greatest degree of autonomy, things are being "directed by the Minister," not by the council but by the minister. That doesn't suggest autonomy to me. Again, we've got these diametrically opposed ideas that are bumping into each other, and because of that statement, when we talk about meeting with groups like students or academic staff members, presidents, board chairs, because the minister decides who the group actually meets with,

does that give the minister the opportunity to maybe skip a group? That is a problem.

Madam Speaker, as you served in the 29th Legislature, one of the things that the opposition had a very significant problem with at that time was any kind of powers that were given to a minister to make decisions. It seemed they always wanted somebody else except the minister. Yet here we are seeing yet again – and I've seen this throughout the course of the 30th Legislature – giving powers to the minister.

When I talked about that challenge, you know, when I hear these things from members of the government benches, members of the government caucus that served earlier, do you actually believe that, or was it just something you said at the time? If you actually do believe that, just like you believed sending bills to committee was the smart thing to do, if you actually believe that, then you should have no problems actually sending Bill 74 to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future for further study. By voting against this, then really what you're saying is that you never believed that stance to begin with. That's my challenge. Is that actually part of your value system, or is it just something that you wanted to say because it seemed convenient or something at the time?

I would like to see Bill 74 head to committee to be able to look at some of these things, get a chance to consult further, you know, once we can see that list, hopefully, fingers crossed, about who was consulted with. Maybe we can add a few more to that list and get a chance to talk to them. I know that was also a problem for some members back then. They always felt: well, you didn't consult with this group or this individual. Whatever the list was, it almost never lined up, quite honestly, with the list that we had. I would like to see that same opportunity afforded, then, to me now that I'm a member of the opposition.

So there's my challenge. I'm hoping that we will see that list, that we'll see a favourable outcome for this referral motion to send it to committee and get a chance to talk to people about this path to 2030, how they felt maybe, for instance, about the elimination of STEP and how that could affect their path forward, maybe about some of the challenges that people are experiencing if, you know, they're going back to further their education. As my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud has always been very, very attuned around child care, what kinds of things can we do to help those students so that they can go back and make their lives better for them and their children or help some of the up-and-coming students with the barriers that they're facing, whether it be financial or others like mental health supports, things like that.

Maybe we can have a very open and frank conversation around what brings businesses to Alberta, because we've clearly heard that in this discussion, too. It's been made very, very obvious that a simple corporate tax break is not enough. Otherwise, you know, we should have seen businesses, big corporations absolutely flocking to Alberta because it was very much signalled, even before the 2019 election, that this was going to happen. It's not like they didn't have a heads-up, and they knew where the finish line was going to be before the race even started. What is it that actually brings them to Alberta?

11:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South. I should begin my comments by saying that I will not be supporting this referral amendment. I assume that comes as a significant shock to the members opposite, that we would not be supporting a referral amendment moved by them. However, I do

believe there are a number of reasons why. I'll get to maybe one or two of them right now, the first of which is time.

We are now in the second week of debating Bill 74, and there has been ample time for members opposite to rise in this Chamber and to speak on this bill and give their feelings about postsecondary education in the province, without question an important topic. I myself have a postsecondary degree. I also have a master's degree, and I see the value in education, and the province does as well. The government here does as well. But, with that said, in order to make postsecondary education what we see as the vision for it in the Alberta 2030 plan, we have to actually pass legislation that gets us there. That includes Bill 74, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.

While I would not ever look at suppressing an opportunity for a member to give their feelings on this bill both in the Chamber and outside of the Chamber, at least on this one specifically, if there comes a time where we need to see progress so that we can work for Albertans, then actions will have to be taken by members on this side. There are precedents for that in this Chamber. To that point, Madam Speaker, I do see that there is no need for a referral motion. Members opposite are having ample time at second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading to speak to this bill. Further reviewing in the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future would not be necessary.

Now to my feelings about the bill. I believe that the members opposite have based their entire argument on the premise that the trajectory to success follows a singular and linear path, which is junior high school, high school, postsecondary, and then landing a job. But I do find – and it has been my experience in speaking with some constituents – that that is not the only way to find success. In Cardston, for example, and in many places, in many other towns in southern Alberta, members of the community, after graduating high school, will do maybe a gap year.

Some will do something similar to what I did, which was that after my first year of university I left Canada. I went to Russia, where I lived for two years doing a service mission for my church. It was one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life. In coming back to Alberta, I think I had a better idea of what I wanted to do. I also learned a new language. I learned the opportunity to speak Russian. I met a ton of friends and really had an eye-opening experience over there as to what it's like living in other countries and other cultures and the opportunities afforded to them.

It also, if I may say, gave me a much deeper appreciation for this country of Canada and this province of Alberta, a place that has done so much for me, my family, and for families across this province and across this country. It's a beautiful place to be and a place that – both my grandfathers fought in World War II. [interjection] I won't take any interventions at this exact moment, but when the time comes, I will certainly inform the Chamber. I just haven't finished my thought yet, Member, so I appreciate that.

But there is no singular trajectory to success, so when looking at what your future may or may not be, you do have to analyze some of the risks involved with that. There are, of course, financial risks involved, and that goes with tuition. I have heard a number of times this morning that members keep referencing tuition, the cost of tuition. Alberta's tuition is certainly in line with other jurisdictions in the country. I have a degree from Dalhousie University, where tuition is quite high. I also paid for that tuition, similar to the Member for Edmonton-Decore, with a basketball scholarship. Now, people will say: well, you just played sports to pay for tuition. Well, I spent more than 20 hours a week committed to that program. If you convert that into hours worked in a retail environment, you know, the numbers effectively work out almost the same.

I certainly made a sacrifice in order to pay for my own tuition in addition to taking out student loans, but I also understood generally where I wanted to go with my career. I would say, as a side note, that being a politician wasn't exactly at the forefront of my ideas, but I certainly wanted to work in this industry, so I worked towards that.

But it was an investment for me, Madam Speaker. It was a significant investment for me and my wife because I also did a master's degree in political strategy from George Washington University, and that was an incredible experience. I learned a ton about campaign management and policy development, but it did not come at a small cost financially. But I wasn't going to allow that cost to be the only barrier for me entering the world that I so love today. I had to make sacrifices. I understand that cost can be a barrier, but I would also suggest that when looking at a future career, when looking at education, one must take into consideration the financial risk.

I have seen first-hand experiences where students are going to university with the intent of spending four years to find themselves. That comes at a significant financial cost. Student debt can be crippling for so many. Trust me that I know very well what student debt can do and the stresses it can put on you and put on the people that are around you, so those need to be considered. I would hate for members opposite to argue that student debt is the only barrier to postsecondary. It is a significant one, but it's the one that members opposite keep referencing, and it is to suggest that it is the government's responsibility to alleviate the stresses of the real world. Financial stress is a real stress.

The Member for Red Deer-South spoke quite eloquently, and I wish I would have had the opportunity to take his tax course. It would have been absolutely riveting, I'm certain. Madam Speaker, education is very important, but postsecondary or getting an undergraduate degree may not be for everyone. I have lots of constituents who do very well for themselves who decided to forgo university, get into agriculture, or take a different path, and they are all the better for it. It doesn't make having an undergraduate degree less or more so much as that it wasn't their path.

I would hope that members opposite would understand – and I can't assume that they do or they don't – that education is important, but to suggest that the moves the government is making, the bills we're putting forward, are creating barriers for education and university students to get their degree I think would be false.

I would take interventions at any point now. I do see the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much to the member. Again, it's hard to know exactly when to interject without a point being made, but I appreciate the clarity brought through that. I think he brings up a very valid point, Madam Speaker, that the decisions that go into your education are vast, and I would like to hear this member share a little bit more about his journey if he's willing.

From what I heard, he's at least had two or three postsecondary institutions in that knowledge, and given the depth and breadth of Dalhousie University and George Washington University and Russia in that mix I can't believe that cost was the only factor that motivated him. It doesn't seem like those were necessarily a low-cost avenue to the goal and the future that he fought for and desired for his life. I would like to hear the other things that compelled him to seek those opportunities, to make those sacrifices, both financially and relationally, if he wouldn't mind.

Thank you.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, hon. member. It does give me an opportunity to briefly talk a little bit more about my education path.

As I had said previously in this Chamber in other sessions, when I first went into university, I considered myself more of an athletic student, but that changed after my time living overseas, where I became a student athlete. I actually spent my first year of university at Simon Fraser in British Columbia, on top of the hill, as they say, and it was certainly an eye-opening experience, but after a year there I realized that it wasn't really the place for me.

11:30

After my time living overseas, I transferred to the University of Calgary, where I continued my education and my athletic pursuits, playing basketball there, but ultimately decided that I wasn't really enjoying what was my experience there and decided ultimately to transfer to Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia. You could say that I went from coast to coast, learned the most. I had a blast. Dalhousie: my, what a time to be alive it was. After that, I went and played professional basketball and then decided to do a master's degree, and that's where I spent some time in Washington, DC, learning about the ways of this political world.

At no point did I look at the financial barriers exclusively. I looked at the opportunity that that education would afford me. I would like to say that in my own humble, personal opinion I am better off for that education, but it certainly was a sacrifice for me and for my wife as we have worked to pay off those student loans and those financial commitments. I thought it was worth it because, to me, Madam Speaker, it was an investment. It was an investment in my career, an investment in my family, an investment in my children, and I ultimately learned skills that I will be able to pass on to my own kids. Should they pursue a career in politics, I can teach the heck out of campaign management, so there's that.

The other thing here is, you know, this idea of just giving away education. [interjection] Oh, I would certainly give way to the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, hon. member. Most times I'm looking up at you, except in the back row that I can see eye to eye.

The experiences that we have when it comes to education – through you, obviously, to the member, Madam Speaker – there is no risk without reward; there is no pain with no gain. Those are items that actually test merit and strength. I would propose to a lot of folks that if it's too easy, anybody can do it. I think that shows true a lot of times when we're talking about mental stresses with students. The coping mechanisms: you have to do that when you have deliverables. It's not insurmountable, and it's worth it. We need to temper our students to do that.

With that, I'd like to ask the member if he could expand on that, some of the things that he had to go through that made him have that fortitude, not only the successes but some of the failures and the trips to make you who you are today and to be such a leader in your community.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, hon. member, for those questions. Certainly, I could touch on a couple of things that I had to overcome. They might seem minor, but one is motion sickness. Reading on a bus for hours on end is not easy – that sounds a bit ridiculous, but it is the truth – reading textbooks, very dense content.

The other, of course, frankly, is the financial commitment. Debt and interest weigh heavily on the mind and the heart, Madam Speaker. I understand that if anyone has a mortgage or has student loans that they're thinking about or credit card debt, whatever it may be, whatever kind of debt you carry, debt is always there, and it is always accumulating.

The other thing I would say is physical fatigue. While I can understand working a shift at a restaurant or a retail store is very

difficult and earnest work, it is different than the work that I was used to working in university, staying up late for practices, going to the weight room, and then having to stay up even later and study when I'm already exhausted, getting up for 6 a.m. practices, you know, trying to manage your diet well. I know a lot of my roommates in university had a strong diet of ramen noodles. It just wasn't going to cut it for me. I was consuming a lot of calories on a daily basis and needed to do that.

Actually, speaking to the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland's comments with regard to personal sacrifice, I believe it was Thomas Paine in his *American Crisis*. He said, "What we obtain [cheaply], we esteem too lightly," Madam Speaker. What we obtain cheaply, we esteem too lightly. That's just it. If it was easy, everybody would do it. The greater the potential risk, the greater the potential reward, and people who have the fortitude to step forward and take that risk, be it financial or otherwise, there is a potential reward there but also opportunity for failure. I can't substantiate this, but I heard once that Walt Disney went bankrupt six times before he hit it big with his ultimate success.

There are lessons learned there, Madam Speaker. Life is not going to be given to any of us; we have to work for it. I actually have to take a moment again and commend every member of this Chamber because running for office in and of itself – we are one of 87 members occupying this job in the entire province. It makes it a pretty unique position, and it is one that is sought after by many and one that takes a lot of personal sacrifice to even decide if you are going to do it. Then, of course, there's the idea of winning. You take the risk of throwing your name on a nomination ballot and working hard and selling memberships, or however the process works in your own individual party, only to maybe not be successful, and then what?

There is risk everywhere, Madam Speaker, risk all around us. I think the whole purpose of what I'm getting at here is... [interjection] Honestly, if the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has something that they would like to say, more than welcome to stand and ask for an intervention. I'd be happy to take one. Otherwise, it would be customary to maintain decorum within the Chamber while other members are speaking.

With that said, Madam Speaker, I do think it is important that we move forward with this piece of legislation with the intent of making Alberta the most attractive jurisdiction in the country to work, to live, to get an education, whatever that may be, whatever that may look like, whether it's on-the-job training or whether it's in-the-classroom training or both.

Alberta has an incredibly bright future. I'm so proud of this province and the residents here and all the work they've put into making it what it is, people who came before me and the people who came before them. It's a beautiful country and it's a beautiful province, and, I tell you, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. That's why I decided to run, so that I could be part of making this a better place. This piece of legislation certainly creates an environment where Alberta students can become leaders in the world. Given the commodities that we have in our province, we are a world player, Madam Speaker, and we have to act like it. Though we may not get treated like that by Ottawa in many instances, we're not just going to lay over and allow Ottawa to dictate to us the Alberta way.

With these remarks, I will simply conclude by saying this. I think this is an important piece of legislation. The amendment, though maybe well intended by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South, is not one that I would encourage members on this side of the House and all members to support. We have an opportunity to create an environment for postsecondary education in this province that is second to none and world class, and this part of it. I say: let's get

moving with this legislation, vote in favour, and make Alberta one of the most prosperous jurisdictions in the world.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to the join debate? Traditionally we would go to a member of the opposition now, which would be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hopefully, we'll get a chance to hear from the minister as well, but I've been dying to get my points in today, so thank you for this. Truly, advanced education and postsecondary is an area that I'm quite passionate about, and I do have a number of comments that I would like to get on the record for Bill 74.

Of course, in my remarks I aim to outline why it is necessary that this piece of legislation be referred to committee. You know, I've had the opportunity – actually, gosh, I think this is the second time that I've got to hear all my colleagues in this Chamber speak to this bill. Of course, many of the people on this side of the House were part of a government that prioritized investments in education at large, particularly postsecondary education.

11:40

You know, many folks are aware of my own background in education, particularly in K to 12 education, and starting my career, of course, teaching. I've talked about this many times in this House, so apologies to my colleagues here for having to hear these stories once again, but I can imagine that there are so many new people tuning in right now, waiting with bated breath to hear the story that I'm about to tell you, including the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Mostly her, actually, so thank you.

You know, one of the things I did: I started teaching at the spry age of barely 21 out in Bawlf, Alberta, and had the opportunity to – in fact, I was barely 21, and I had 19-year-olds in my class that I was teaching. At that time I was a bit more, for lack of a better word, feminine looking. I brought out the pantsuits and the skirts and the high heels and really tried to make myself look extra old. I remember one blazer with shoulder pads, so just really looking like I was old.

I tell you that because I had a lot of conversations with students, with those high school students in particular. I taught a lot of the dash-2 students, so students who weren't in the academic courses. I had just started teaching, and that was a really cool opportunity because a lot of those kids were really grappling with their future and what exactly they would do when they left high school, when they left the community of Bawlf. Many kids didn't feel like they had – they struggled with the fact that they didn't have a clear route mapped out, and I would always talk to them about the fact that, like, you don't. You know, you don't need to have a plan mapped out. Life can change very, very quickly. I mean, I'm a great example.

I still remember when I started teaching in Bawlf, Alberta, that I went to the main floor – sadly, the school that I taught at is now gone and was replaced with a beautiful new school. They had a wall of all the teachers that had taught there for, like, 30 years, that sort of thing. I remember saying to one of my colleagues: I can't wait till my picture is up there because I want to teach for the rest of my career. I laugh, of course, because I ended up only teaching there for about four and half years, and then I went to another school in Forestburg and then came to the big old city of Edmonton.

You know, I would tell students that, like, it's okay if you don't have your future mapped out and just talking to them about the fact that, as one of my colleagues across the floor stated, it doesn't have to be university, right? I still remember talking with a student whose

mom was really pushing him to go into engineering at the U of A. That was her dream for him. I knew the student well. I taught him. I knew that university engineering was not the place for him. He loved working with his hands. He was doing mechanics and whatnot. At Bawlf, sadly, we didn't have a lot of programs like automotives and whatnot, but a lot of kids would do work experience. He was so good at that, and he loved it, and he thrived. He absolutely thrived in that environment. Sadly, he gave into the pressure of what his mom wanted for him and went to the U of A into engineering. I think you can predict the outcome of the story. He dropped out in the first year. He dropped out in the first year and then ended up going into a trade. I don't know because I haven't connected with him in a long time, but I know that he was thriving immediately afterwards, right?

My teaching career, of course, was short, but I can tell you just the number of conversations I had with kids of that nature, just to let them know that there are so many opportunities available to them and that there doesn't need to be this one clear path and that if you do choose one path and it changes, that's okay, too. You know, this just kind of, I think, I hope, serves to highlight just how important it is that we as legislators in this province offer those paths – right? – so that kids have the opportunity to choose multiple paths, whatever that might be. [interjection] Oh, I guess. I mean, I was in the midst of something incredible there, but I will cede to my colleague.

Mr. Dang: Thank you. Unfortunately, I guess, my comment might not be as incredible, but I'm happy to ask. I'm happy to hear those comments because here is where, I think, my colleagues who were teachers or taught in the past are so informative. We're talking about training in an advanced education system that is supposed to work for these students, right? It's supposed to create and foster these opportunities for these students. Perhaps one of the things – and I know that members have spoken a lot about tuition today, but my colleague was talking a lot about planning and how people can't always plan for where they will end up. I'm wondering if students who do want to make those decisions or aren't sure where they're going are still looking to have stability, right? I think it's so important when you're in your formative years and trying to make decisions about where you want to end up, that stability is something that allows you to weigh your options. I'm wondering whether the impacts this government has made to tuition and stability of education and the massive cuts would have had impacts on your students in the past.

Member Irwin: Yeah. Absolutely. I'll get to your point there around stability by noting that – you know, I was starting to say there that as legislators it's our responsibility to ensure that kids have options, whatever they might be, and I'm very much fearful that those options are becoming more limited for kids, right? I think, of course, I used an example of a student going into the trades, but we had a number of really incredibly academic students as well out there in Bawlf who chose to go to the university and go to other postsecondary institutions. I mean, I can think back to my own, I guess, childhood in Barrhead, Alberta as well. I know that there were a few of us who chose to go to the U of A in Edmonton and others who chose to go to other academic institutions.

You know, I taught a lot of kids out in rural Alberta and I grew up with a lot of kids in rural Alberta who didn't have the financial means and didn't have a family that could provide support for tuition. Don't get me wrong. I was lucky myself to have a pretty stable upbringing, but I know that I still had to pinch pennies as a student and work really hard to get some scholarships as well. I had two older sisters who were also in university, so at one point my

parents had three girls all in university. They couldn't help us a lot, and it was on us to really try to support our own education.

Absolutely, to the Member for Edmonton-South, I worry greatly. I worry greatly about this, and I just think of that kid in Bawlf right now who's, you know, struggling with their future and not sure which path they're going to take or that there may not even be a path to take. And that's okay, too. Don't get me wrong. I know that someone mentioned that over there. Postsecondary of any form is not necessarily a right path for folks.

But, again, let me get back to why it's on us as MLAs in this Chamber to do whatever we can to support a robust postsecondary education for all Albertans. We have so few times where we can really – you know, the minister had a few opportunities to introduce bills specific to his ministry. I know that we've talked about a couple in the past, in previous sessions, so I would ask him why it was, when there are so many pressing postsecondary issues, that this was his priority. What was it that made some of the key aspects of Bill 74 his priority? I have to tell you that these priorities aren't the ones that line up with the students that I've spoken to.

I'll get to that in a minute, but, first of all, I want to just talk about the fact that, like, I'm so concerned. I know my colleagues have said this probably more aptly than me, but I'm so concerned about the fact that many students, many young people right now may be choosing to leave our province to study elsewhere. My fantastic colleague here from St. Albert talked about the fact that her own son – was it? – left to study elsewhere because he didn't see the opportunities here, particularly when you get into the levels of higher education where you're looking at things like research opportunities and grants. When you're one of the most historically esteemed institutions world-wide, world-class institutions – the University of Alberta is being fully decimated. That makes it an unattractive place for young people to want to study or to start their academic careers, right?

11:50

I worry deeply that the decisions this government is making are going to continue to push young people away at a time when, more than ever, we need to be bringing them here. We need to be keeping them here. We need to be attracting them. You know, when tuition has risen by about 15 per cent, when almost 1,500 FTEs, full-time equivalents, have been laid off in our postsecondary institutions, when the budget for Advanced Education has been cut by hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, these are all alarming numbers, which are resulting in equally alarming trends.

Let me talk a little bit about how I'm concerned that the priorities of this government when it comes to postsecondary education, advanced education, are not aligned with those of the folks that I have spoken with. I have, like many people, at least on this side of the Chamber, talked to students, talked to a whole number of staff, academic and nonacademic, and others at various institutions. I'm lucky to have in my riding Concordia University, which is a fantastic institution that's doing a lot of really great things. Later today I'm headed to the University of Alberta to speak to a class and looking forward to being back on campus again.

In recent conversations that I've had, I've really dug in a little bit to some of the priorities that particularly students have. I want to acknowledge the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, who noted, you know, and admitted that one of his shortcomings, one of his few shortcomings, might I note, was that when he was the minister, they didn't do a good job of engaging folks before they entered the postsecondary system. I think that's a really, really important point. [interjection] I will let Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, and my apologies. I feel like I always jump up at a little bit of an inopportune time. My colleague will accost me later for that, I'm sure. Certainly, I think that one of the comments around consultation is very interesting. Every government is going to be criticized for not doing enough consultation. I think that's a common thread in oppositions and in the media and in the public, but I think on that idea, and I'm hoping that this is where my hon. colleague was going, it is alarming particularly how little consultation this government has done and how little they've talked to Albertans and the people who will actually be affected by some of this legislation. So perhaps my colleague can elaborate a little bit on that. I hope I haven't thrown off her vibe a little bit too much here. I think that this is an important topic. I think it's important that we do have the opportunity to discuss why Albertans are so disenfranchised with this government in particular, why Albertans don't believe that this government has their best interests in mind. Hopefully, my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood will be able to elaborate.

Member Irwin: Yeah. Absolutely. You know, this trend of inadequate consultation – I'm getting déjà vu here because I know we've all, on this side of the Chamber, risen multiple times to talk about how this government has accused us of lack of consultation, yet we can point to the countless examples in this government's short tenure that have shown inadequate consultation. We've seen the power of people pushing back when they feel that they haven't been adequately consulted. Examples that come to mind include coal, chopping off the tops of our mountains, parks – right? – and even to some degree – well, we'll see. It's yet to be seen if this will be the case, but curriculum. I mean, Albertans are absolutely speaking out in huge, huge volumes on those issues because they felt that they hadn't been consulted and they're not being heard.

You know, I was just starting to note that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said that one thing that is incredibly important is talking to students before they enter the postsecondary system, whatever form that might take. I think back to my colleague from Edmonton-North West and his time when he was Education minister. [interjection] Let me finish this thought, please. When he was Education minister, he had the Minister's Youth Council, and I saw that – I was working at the ministry. I saw the power of that youth council: kids from all corners of the province feeling like they were being heard and that their voices really mattered.

I meet with young people all the time under the age of 18, and one of the things I always leave them with is: "Don't let anyone, especially politicians, tell you or make you feel like your voices don't matter. Just because you can't vote doesn't mean your voice is not critical to these future decisions and to these bigger conversations." Do you want to . . . [interjection] Yeah, in the spirit of collegiality, I'm going to let the Minister of Advanced Education speak.

Mr. Nicolaides: I appreciate that, and thank you to the member for accepting an intervention. I think that's very notable. I just wanted to take a minute, because I know that's all the time I have, just to make a comment as it relates to consultation – I know the member was just talking about that – and just to remind the Assembly that during the process of the development of Alberta 2030 we held 100 one-on-one interviews, 30 round-table discussions, six town halls, received 5,600 survey responses, and established a guiding coalition to lead and guide the entire effort, that included students. I think any comment that there hasn't been adequate consultation on the development of Alberta 2030, which is thus informing the developments in Bill 74, is a little misplaced.

There have been numerous public statements from student leaders and postsecondary presidents who have commended the government for listening and for the level of consultation that occurred throughout the development of Alberta 2030 and the subsequent development of this legislation. I just wanted to take the opportunity to make that comment.

Thank you.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Minister, for that. You know, it's interesting that you brought up Alberta 2030. Gosh, I have so much more to say, but fortunately we will have more opportunities, I'm sure. I had a chance to look through Alberta 2030, of course, that document which I think was a result of the Mackenzie report, that cost around \$3.7 million. Don't get me started on how those millions of dollars could have been spent otherwise, but looking at some of those goals – developing skills for jobs, supporting commercialization, strengthening internationalization, system governments, sustainability – many of these are admirable goals, absolutely. But I think back to a recent conversation I had with representatives from the Council of Alberta University Students. They shared with us their priorities, and I don't see much, if any,

overlap between the priorities of this government and what countless students are asking for, right?

I'd really love to get into each of these pieces in a bit more detail, and I hope I can because these are really critical topics, like ending gender and domestic violence. Sexual violence on campus, we know, is a huge systemic issue that is going to need targeted, intentional action if we are going to improve it. I think we can all agree on that – right? – but we need to hear this minister talking about that and telling us what specifically he's going to do to make that priority something that's truly addressed.

Expanding affordable child care. We've talked about child care, we've talked about the critical importance of that for students, yet we haven't heard this government and we haven't seen . . . [Member Irwin's speaking time expired] So much more to say. Oh, my goodness.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I see the clock strikes noon. That means the House is adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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