



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 2, 2021

Day 122

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
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United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 2, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Members' Statements

COVID-19 Response and Premier's Leadership

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, last night's debate in this House on the government's failure to manage the COVID-19 pandemic revealed things that were truly disturbing. The government, most notably the Premier and the Minister of Finance, were given multiple chances to make it clear exactly who was in charge as the fourth wave of COVID-19 crashed into Alberta. Tens of thousands got sick, hundreds died, and thousands upon thousands have seen their critical, non-COVID surgeries cancelled. The fourth wave has been devastating.

Albertans are telling us that they want answers on how this happened. They want accountability. Who was the head of the ship? Who was in charge? The Premier vanished in the month of August. He emptied his calendars and left his responsibilities behind to jet-set to Europe. Premiers are entitled to vacations; they are not entitled to leave no one in charge, especially during a public health crisis. My colleagues asked the Minister of Finance if he was in charge. According to the government's own order in council he is the next in line of succession. The minister first implied he was in charge. Then, when asked again, he avoided the question. The Premier has maintained that he was in charge, too.

It seems no one on that side of the House knows who was calling the shots. No wonder the fourth wave has been so, so terrible. The Minister of Service Alberta is the absolute last in line of succession. Does he know who was in charge? How about the Government House Leader? The minister of economic development? Anyone over there?

I am proud to be on a team with a leader who doesn't hide from the tough decisions, an example this Premier could learn from. I'm proud to have so many colleagues that she trusts to make the tough decisions when she needs a little break. It's called leadership, Mr. Speaker. This Premier is not a leader. He has failed Albertans during the fourth wave, and so did every single member of that cabinet, and still no one is willing to take responsibility. Shame on each and every one of them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Provincial Police Force Feasibility Study

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Justice announced that their report of a potential Alberta police service was received from PricewaterhouseCoopers. The report confirmed that the provincial police service, in fact, is feasible. The report confirmed that it could provide Albertans with services better tailored to meet the local needs, and the overall costs would be less than they currently are for the RCMP. This is good information to have, and it will help inform the conversation around policing.

In rural Alberta a police officer is only a call away. It's the in-person presence that's the issue. The criminals know it, and they prey on rural Albertans because of it. I've heard some sobering testimonies from my constituents at town halls, over the phone, and in person. The larger concern is the repetitive and higher potential

for violence in these situations. In some cases police are hours away to intervene, not minutes. There is a problem, and we need to talk about solutions.

Before we go any further, I want to be very clear. I am deeply appreciative of Alberta's front-line RCMP officers as well as my local staff sergeants, who are very engaged and doing all they can within the constraints of the system. We will never forget the Fallen Four out in Mayerthorpe.

The problem, as in so many cases, lies in Ottawa, where the bureaucrats who are disconnected from the realities of life in rural Alberta ultimately are making the decisions. Under the current system, if a community needs an increased police presence, they have no power to effect it; neither does the province. The request must go to Ottawa. Requests sometimes take years to fulfill, and sometimes they go unanswered entirely. On top of this, the RCMP system effectively prevents local policing, with officers often being moved in communities before they really even have a chance to truly settle in.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition may dismiss the policing concerns of rural Albertans, but this government will not. I'm glad that the Minister of Justice is carefully looking at the issue, and I trust that the decision-making process will be open and transparent to all Albertans so that they know that there are real options to solve the real problems.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Breast Cancer Patient Support in Grande Prairie

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the wonderful work of the Support the Girls initiative in my constituency of Grande Prairie. This initiative continues to work tirelessly to bring awareness and support to women who have been diagnosed and affected by breast cancer. Support the Girls is a charitable fashion show event and fundraising campaign organized by a committee consisting of Alison Gustafson, Cathi Hobbins, Vickie Stokke, Dawn Marie Crouse, Robyn Guenette, Jennifer Thompson, Donna Koch, and Jodie Boyne. This group has been selflessly dedicated to supporting women who are struggling with or who have survived a breast cancer diagnosis. I have had the honour of personally working on this committee since its inception, and I know first-hand the incredible work done by these women.

This team has brought support to a group of women whose lives have been forever changed by breast cancer. While the initiative began with modest fundraising goals, they have raised upwards of \$80,000 and counting since 2018, an incredible accomplishment given that both 2020 and 2021 events were not possible due to COVID. But where there's a will, Mr. Speaker, there's a way, and these ladies have been creative to keep this initiative going through raffle and other means. The money raised is outfitting a specialized room at the new Grande Prairie hospital for women undergoing mammography, biopsy, and related treatment. The room will provide a comfortable, warm, spalike experience for these women.

The Support the Girls event was born out of a desire to give back, marking the celebration of 25 years in business for Ms Gustafson, the local Grande Prairie clothing store owner of Victoria's Attic. I want to offer sincere congratulations to my friend Alison Gustafson on her accomplishment of 25 years as a successful female entrepreneur and on the tremendous success of the Support the Girls initiative. Victoria's Attic remains dedicated to outfitting women who have undergone mastectomy and other breast cancer treatments, offering bra fitting and specialized clothing for these women to feel beautiful.

Initiatives like Support the Girls are powerful examples of kindness and compassion and the power of civil society. On behalf of the community of Grande Prairie I want to say thank you and encourage everyone to support the girls.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Diwali

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to rise today to mark this year's festivities for Diwali. On November 4, 2021, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist communities world-wide will celebrate the festival of lights. This festival will be marked by more than 1 billion people across the globe.

It's known to Hindus as Diwali or Deepavali, a celebration to honour Lord Ramachandra and the belief that on this day he returned to his kingdom after 14 years of exile, where he fought and defeated the demons and the demon king Ravana. Sikhs around the globe celebrate it as Bandi Chhor Divas, day of liberation, commemorating the release of the sixth Guru Hargobind Singh, who also negotiated the release of 52 other Hindu kings from the prison along with him. To Buddhists, it is celebrated as the day that the Emperor Ashoka was converted to Buddhism and is known as Ashoka Vijaya Dashmi. On the very same day, the Jain community celebrates the attainment of moksha by Mahavira.

These celebrations mark the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair. The days are marked world-wide with compassion and love, families exchanging gifts, lighting diyas, joining in prayers, and sharing with those in need.

This pandemic has been hard for so many. It has meant that the celebrations of Diwali have been different than in the past, but I would like to highlight the importance of hope over despair, which gives us a continuous strength to fight back these hard times courageously. I'm excited and proud to witness how our communities have come together to support the continued hard work of our health care workers by moving their celebrations to virtual platforms. I will be attending a virtual event with the opposition leader tonight, and I welcome you all to join and participate.

Once again, on behalf of my caucus I would like to wish you a very happy Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prime Minister of Canada

Mr. Yao: Shock and horror, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, astoundingly, a teacher in Ontario went to school in blackface. Canadians across the country are acting with astoundment and surprise. What I wonder is: why should we be surprised? This is what happens when you re-elect a national leader who did not just blackface but blackbody multiple times with no repercussions, no criticism from the usually vocal social justice warriors and mainstream media. So why would we think that would end?

SNC-Lavalin bribed officials in Libya, including the son of the dictator Gaddafi. Despite a Justice minister in Jody Wilson-Raybould trying to do the right thing and holding them accountable for their crimes, this Prime Minister forced her out along with Jane Philpott, two strong, smart, elected female officials, for not doing his bidding and protecting this company. Maybe crime does pay. Don't be surprised if women continue to feel downtrodden in today's societies.

1:40

Our Indigenous peoples wish for reconciliation and support to recover and heal from European colonization. This Prime Minister

skips that memorial day so that he can hang ten in Tofino. Indigenous Canadians probably shouldn't get their hopes too high for federal efforts towards reconciliation this round.

A leader that flies overseas to attend a climate conference to virtue signal like no one else can, promising to quash Canadian energy despite the small footprint created. Meanwhile he ignores Russia and the Middle Eastern nations producing the same hydrocarbon products, who are expanding vigorously to meet world demand. He supports this oil from the Middle East, supporting regimes that crucify the LGBTQ2S population and treat foreign workers like slaves.

When you choose to elect a Prime Minister that despite the virtue signalling demonstrates the most severe examples of so many things that we do not want to see in our society, Canadians should not act surprised that someone would do blackface every now and again. They should remember the role model whom they voted for to lead this nation.

Thank you.

Family Violence Prevention Month

Ms Sigurdson: November is Family Violence Prevention Month. This is an important time and opportunity to raise awareness about family violence, advocate for action to prevent it, and implement policies to assist Albertans in dangerous situations. Family violence can take many forms. It involves sexual and physical violence, stalking, emotional and financial abuse.

As the Seniors and Housing critic for the NDP I find the increasing rise of elder abuse to be troubling. The rate of police-reported family violence against seniors rose to 8 per cent from 2018 to 2019 in Canada. Sadly, here in Alberta 9 per cent of seniors experience abuse, which is almost 1 per cent higher than the Canadian average. Clearly, much has to be done to address elder abuse and ensure seniors are safe.

Concerns of domestic and family violence have also increased during the pandemic. The city of Calgary has seen an increase in calls to police and agencies before incidents become violent. This is important because it provides time for people in dangerous situations to connect with help. This is why Family Violence Prevention Month is so important. For anyone experiencing family violence in any form, know that you can call 310.1818 at any time or use the online chat at alberta.ca/safetychat to find help.

As legislators in this Assembly I hope this month offers some time for reflection on what we can do to ensure Albertans are safe. We need to ensure emergency shelters, including domestic violence shelters, are open and available to those who need them, especially as poverty increases and winter approaches. When we invest in affordable housing, we must ensure that it addresses diverse needs. Family Violence Prevention Month is essential to shine a light on this tragic issue. However, awareness is just a start. Action must follow.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I believe that all members in this Chamber will agree that access to affordable housing is the foundation of a well-functioning society. Unfortunately, this foundation is struggling due to an outdated and inflexible system. Over the last two years Alberta's government has built more than 1,500 units of safe, affordable housing for low-income Albertans, but government investment alone will not keep pace with demand.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot keep investing in a system that simply isn't working. That's why we are strengthening it. Over the next 10 years Alberta's government will provide more affordable housing

that meets the needs of Albertans. Yesterday I was pleased to support the release of stronger foundations, Alberta's 10-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing. This strategy outlines how we will support 82,000 households, an increase of more than 40 per cent. The strategy outlines changes for the affordable housing sector. Alberta's government will continue to protect the most vulnerable, ensuring they are not left behind during the next 10 years.

In 2020 I chaired the Affordable Housing Review Panel, made up of housing experts and partners. We reviewed Alberta's housing system and provided recommendations for improving it. We considered market trends and projections, conducted cross-jurisdictional analyses, and heard from Albertans most in need of affordable housing. Their insights and advice helped shape and form the panel's report, which, in turn, provided the basis for stronger foundations.

Yesterday the Minister of Seniors and Housing introduced the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021. The proposed amendments will increase opportunities for partnerships, ensure appropriate oversight of new ventures, and improve governance and capacity across the affordable housing sector.

Mr. Speaker, we promised to Albertans that more affordable housing would be available to those who need it, and we are keeping that promise.

Thank you.

National Skilled Trade and Technology Week

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, today we celebrate National Skilled Trade and Technology Week. As the Skilled Trades Caucus chair and a member of the Skills for Jobs Task Force I want to commend all the hard-working Albertans who've made the skilled trades their career of choice. Also, as a proud journeyman I want to recognize that skilled trades are the backbone of our economy. Alberta's government has embarked on a robust skills for jobs agenda focused on enhancing and supporting skilled trades and apprenticeship training because we know education in these areas has just as much merit and value as a university degree.

Mr. Speaker, skills matter. A skilled workforce is at the very heart of competitiveness and prosperity, and outstanding careers are built on skills. We know that skilled tradespeople, including journeypersons and red seal professionals, are critical to our economy as we continue to tackle the impacts of the pandemic and our economic reality. Part of our plan includes ensuring that thousands of young Albertans have access to the postsecondary education and hands-on training needed to help meet our future labour market demands in trades and technology careers.

I'm proud every time I meet with high school students learning skilled trades or young apprentices getting the education and hands-on experience needed to step up in their future careers. These young people will help shape the future of our province. Today Alberta has amongst the most skilled journeypersons in Canada and indeed the world. They have set the bar high for young people to achieve success. I invite Albertans across the province to join me in thanking and celebrating our skilled tradespeople and the incredible work they have done for our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mayor of Jasper

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, on July 20, 2001, Jasper became a municipality. In Jasper's first election a few months later Richard Ireland was elected as the first mayor of Jasper. Mayor Ireland was born and raised in Jasper. As a kid he grew up skiing, hiking,

climbing, and enjoying Jasper's beautiful outdoor playground. He continues to be an avid outdoorsman, and he is often seen biking throughout town.

In 1989 Ireland became chair of the Jasper town committee and advised Parks Canada on local issues. He served as chair for four terms until he handily won Jasper's first election in 2001. When Jasper was negotiating with the federal government to become a municipality, Mayor Ireland was at the very front of these talks. His dedication to the community he grew up in and raised his family in has allowed him to not only be an advocate for Jasper but a key player in why Jasper exists as we know it today.

Mr. Speaker, this commitment continues 20 years later as Mayor Ireland was recently re-elected to serve another term as mayor of Jasper. In every election since 2001 Mayor Ireland has either run uncontested or won handily over competitors. I believe this is a testament to the quality of his service to the people of Jasper.

As the member representing West Yellowhead, I have the privilege of working with several municipalities and the great people that serve as mayors, Reeves, and councillors. I've learned a lot from my municipal colleagues in my time as MLA. Mayor Ireland is no exception. Mayor Ireland provides a master class in many important lessons of composure, communication skills, dedication to serving others, and, particularly, longevity of service.

Since Jasper is within a national park, those who represent it must communicate with all levels of government on behalf of the community. The skills Mayor Ireland maintains as a lawyer allow him to tackle this task effectively.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Mayor Ireland for his service and dedication. I wish you the best as you lead Jasper through the next four years.

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Response and Premier's Leadership

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night this House discussed how Alberta came to experience this tragic fourth wave. Spoiler alert: the absentee leadership of this Premier and his cabinet has a lot to do with it. The Premier claims he was fully briefed and in charge while on vacation despite having very little memory of what happened, but last night the Finance minister also said that he was responsible. To the Premier: was he responsible for the government's failure to act throughout August of this summer, or was it his Finance minister, second in command while the Premier was in Europe?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, ultimately, I'm responsible for the Executive Council, of course. As I said in early September, I take responsibility and apologize for the analytical error with respect to the decision to move from pandemic to endemic control of COVID-19. As I've pointed out, many jurisdictions around the world with similar rates of vaccination were able to open up fully without unacceptable pressure on their health system. I want to thank Albertans for having risen to the challenge over the past several weeks in beating this fourth wave and substantially increasing vaccination rates. We are much better prepared to face this challenge in the future.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I went on vacation as Premier, there was a list of acting members, and I have this government's similar list right here. It says that when the Premier is gone, the

person in charge is the Finance minister. It is also parliamentary practice for the Premier to advise the Clerk in writing of who carries the Premier's authority in his absence and for that person to acknowledge that receipt of authority, also in writing. Premier, do these letters exist, and if so, can you table them? If not, why not? There was a lot more that went wrong in August than what you're currently taking responsibility for.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. the Leader of the Opposition knows full well that what she's talking about is a question of assigning documents in absence. When the Prime Minister is on personal time or the President of the United States is on personal time, they continue with their executive functions, just as I did on personal time. I was in touch with my staff on a daily basis, spoke frequently with the hon. the Minister of Health at that time. Indeed, we did make decisions during that time, including, for example, the first expansion of the access to booster shots, amongst other things.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's calendar does not suggest he was in contact with anybody on a daily basis.

Now, during the three weeks when this Premier supposedly managed the pandemic from Europe, case counts in Alberta more than tripled. Here is what one senior source told a *Calgary Herald* columnist: "There was no place to go for advice or direction. Ministers and staffers just froze in place or [they] went on vacation themselves." Can the Premier tell us why, when Albertans desperately needed someone to protect their health and their safety and that of their families, all they got were out-of-office replies?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that is completely and entirely untrue. I receive daily exhaustive updates on COVID every day wherever I am, whether it's a quiet Sunday or a busy weekday, as does the Minister of Health, as do all senior officials. Even if I'm taking a day off on a weekend, I'm in daily touch with staff.

Mr. Speaker, we took onboard public health advice. There was an error in announcing moving from pandemic to endemic management. We have taken responsibility for that, but we acted to address the situation as it unfolded responsibly.

Ms Notley: He went on vacation as the situation unfolded.

Now, last night the Premier admitted that he never looked at the modelling that was used to justify the decision to reopen with no plan B faster than anywhere else in the country. It is shocking, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. He admitted that this cabinet made reckless decisions, where the lives of Albertans hang in the balance, without asking for the most basic of evidence. Is that standard operating procedure over there, and if so, how can Albertans trust any decision taken by anybody in this UCP government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course, decisions are made on the basis of evidence. In June and July we were seeing very low levels of active cases, new daily cases, positivity, rate of transmission – hospitalizations were under 100 – yet in that context the NDP wanted a hard lockdown. That would have been, frankly, irresponsible. The reality is that we took onboard advice and the analysis of the chief medical officer that once we reached 70 per cent first-dose vaccination coverage in the eligible population, it would be prudent to lift public health measures.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's record and his comments just now reflect decision-based evidence-making, and the Premier knows it.

Last night I asked when the Premier was informed that the steep rise in cases was going to overwhelm our hospitals. He complained that he didn't keep a diary of every bit of information he received. I would think that the Premier would remember when AHS told him

that they would be no longer able to perform cancer surgeries. To the Premier again: why did you not take action the second that you learned that this horrible failure was coming?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, as I said last night during our all-party debate on COVID-19, as soon as I was presented with information that showed a significant increase in viral spread and a projected increase in hospitalizations that could be very significant, I immediately called a meeting of the Priorities Implementation Cabinet Committee, which immediately adopted recommendations coming from the chief medical officer and the Minister of Health, including mandatory indoor masking across the province and a number of other measures, which were then followed by even more rigorous measures, including the restrictions exemption program.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier claims he was told that 30 per cent of surgeries in Edmonton would be cancelled on the day they were cancelled, except we know AHS has an early warning system forecasting capacity two weeks out at the very minimum. This means that on the day the Premier left on his vacation, AHS would have known that surgeries were going to be cancelled. The Premier was either not briefed and not in charge while in Europe, or he was told, did nothing, and got on the plane anyway. Premier, which is it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, as I said last night, the hon. the Leader of the Opposition asked when the government became aware of data with respect to that we were not seeing the decoupling that Dr. Hinshaw anticipated between infections and hospitalizations. That was presented to us at a Priorities Implementation Cabinet Committee meeting in mid-August, at which time we accepted recommendations to delay the implementation of moving from pandemic to endemic management. All of that is very clear. It's a matter of public record.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition for her third set of questions.

Ms Notley: We waited almost a month for real action. Now, that's quite a few wishy-washy answers there. I'd say that the Premier is lucky we're not actually in a courtroom.

Provincial Police Force Feasibility Study

Ms Notley: But speaking of law enforcement, this government also announced a potential runway for the Alberta police force, cancelling the RCMP, and leaving Albertans on the hook for north of \$1.3 billion over five years, an idea loudly rejected by municipal leaders, by Indigenous leaders, and by a majority of Albertans. The motive here is suspicious, to say the least. Why is the Premier so intent on blowing up the RCMP while under investigation by the RCMP?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Fair Deal Panel recommended to this government that we explore the possibility of adopting a provincial police force similar to the police forces that have long existed in Quebec, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and that, in fact, existed in Alberta prior to the 1940s. I encourage the member to read the report because, in fact, I would think that somebody coming from the political left such as her would be encouraged to see a report that would integrate social services, social workers, psychologists, child workers, and Indigenous governance into our provincial police modelling.

Ms Notley: The Fair Deal Panel also said that 60 per cent of Albertans were opposed to this.

Now, three weeks ago, on October 8, the RCMP confirmed to Albertans that the investigation into the UCP leadership scandal is ongoing. So far about a third of cabinet and a handful of private members have been interviewed by the RCMP, that we know of. Meanwhile the merits of this plan to fire the RCMP outside of their investigation into members of this government appeared to be negligible. Will the Premier agree to halt all changes around the RCMP until their investigation into corrupt practices of his leadership campaign is complete?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, if the Leader of the Opposition were to repeat that last sentence outside, she knows perfectly well that she could be subject to defamation action. Secondly, as the Ernst & Young report makes clear, it would take several years to complete a transition between the RCMP police contract and the establishment of an Alberta provincial police. Thirdly, of course, any ongoing investigations three or four or five years from now would be protected, would continue without any political interference whatsoever.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason 60 per cent of Albertans are opposed to this plan is that it will cost Alberta hundreds of millions of dollars the Premier says that we don't have. It is appropriate to ask: what is motivating this? It is even more so after this government has already set a policy of firing the last independent investigator looking into the same matter the RCMP is today. How can Albertans trust that this decision is about their best interests and not about the best interests of this Premier and those on his leadership campaign?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the concept of re-creating – re-creating – an Alberta provincial police force is hardly a new one. It's been proposed and debated for many years. We're taking a very serious look at it in part because Albertans are telling us that they want a stronger Alberta. They want in principle to be able to exercise exactly the same powers that Ontario and Quebec do in the federation, and they want better policing. They want community policing. They want a province where a kid can grow up in a community and go on to serve that community as a local police officer rather than the constant rotation of RCMP officers that has sometimes led to problems, particularly in responding to rural crime.

Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Building and expanding affordable housing requires all levels of government to work together. Unfortunately, the UCP has downloaded responsibility to municipalities and has refused to work with the federal government. Their new legislation is an abomination that moves to privatize existing and future affordable housing. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing. The UCP should be building public affordable housing and ensuring that every Albertan has a roof over their heads. Why is this government so determined to sell off our affordable housing to the highest bidder?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government is acting on the recommendations that the Affordable Housing Review Panel provided to us in fall 2020. Recommendation 2 says that developing the provincial asset management plan is a first step to move the government of Alberta from being an owner of affordable housing assets to regulating and funding housing programs. Recommendation 3 says to develop and implement a

strategic assets transfer plan that achieves equity, safety, flexibility, and sector financial stability.

Ms Sigurdson: The new strategy recommends that the government identify opportunities to maximize and leverage federal funding to increase the supply of affordable housing in Alberta. However, instead of actually doing this, the minister has done what all UCP ministers have done during the pandemic and left federal funding on the table. Before the minister starts putting for-sale signs up on Alberta's affordable housing stock, will she first work with the new municipal council in Edmonton and commit to their request for operational funding for permanent supportive housing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The real estate asset management strategy is about the best use of government-owned assets. These units are currently underused and have been sitting vacant for a long time period and costing lots of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars to maintain them. Our housing strategy will support an additional 25,000 households while reducing wait-lists by 30 per cent.

Ms Sigurdson: The only partnership the UCP wants in housing is public-private partnerships, P3s, which leave many questions about who these deals will serve and how long housing will actually be accessible. It also raises concerns about what's in it for private companies and developers that sign these deals. There are a lot of questions about who will be awarded contracts and whether they will go to the UCP insiders and friends. To the minister: will your government commit to prohibit awarding housing contracts to companies whose executive members have made political contributions to the UCP? Affordable housing is essential.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's absolutely wrong. The members of the opposition always strike that old, outdated, ideological way. The member of the opposition had the opportunity to improve the affordable housing sector, but her 12-page document she called a strategy did not have a meaningful impact as housing wait-lists increased by 65 per cent during her four years of inaction. We promise that this government listens, takes action, and gets results. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has the call.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To say that exciting things are happening in Alberta would be an understatement. When it comes to innovation, especially innovation managing the province's emissions, we are making many important advances and leading the way in responsible, sustainable solutions. Alberta has been a climate leader for decades. We were the first in North America to put a price on carbon, and our energy producers are the best of the best. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: can you please tell this House what some of the recent work you have done on this file is?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was excited to announce yesterday with the Premier the latest instalment of investments for the technology innovation and emissions reduction program in Alberta, \$176 million, going to 16 projects that will

result in 7 million tonnes of emissions being reduced in our economy by 2030, a significant investment and a sharp contrast to the NDP, who continue their close, personal relationship with the federal Liberal government and their dedication with their friends to try and shut down our oil and gas industry. But rest assured that the United Conservative Party is in charge, and we're going to make sure there's a path forward for the men and women who work in the industry.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the opposition has recently criticized our government for not sending any politicians to COP 26 and given that the Leader of the Opposition was quick to make this criticism of our government but could not tell us the amount of emissions that was reduced by her former government's carbon tax and visits to such conferences, once again to the Minister of Environment and Parks: can you tell this House how our government's approach to managing emissions differs from the former NDP's?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP actually spent more than \$100,000 and presumably a lot of CO₂ as they jetted off to United Nations climate conferences while they were in government, and they can't even tell us, as the hon. member said, how many emissions their programs were able to reduce. What I can tell you is that the program that this government has brought into place has been able to invest over \$800 million combined with several billion dollars of joint investment with our industry. That's resulted in an over 40 million reduction in GHG emissions by 2030, again a sharp contrast. We're focusing on working with our industry; they're focusing on hanging out with European elites.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that our government promised technology-driven solutions that will work with our energy industry and not against it to manage emissions and given that our government is committed to sustainable environmental care and stewardship and further given that Alberta is a global leader in pioneering technology that other jurisdictions will need to manage their own emissions more effectively, to the same minister: can you explain some of the past successes of the TIER program?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, while the NDP has been focusing on working with European elites and self-described radical environmental activists, we have been sitting here diligently working with our industry, finding a path forward on climate change. As I said, in the last year we have invested over \$750 million in significant technology that is reducing emissions today inside our province. Again, while the NDP sit there with no plan except for supporting Justin Trudeau and their friends in Europe, we stand with the men and women who work in our oil and gas industry. Alberta is getting it done.

COVID-19 Response and Premier's Leadership (continued)

Ms Hoffman: I was proud to serve as the Deputy Premier in the NDP government. It was a tremendous honour, and one that came with tremendous responsibility. When the Premier was unavailable, I stood in her place. I would make decisions, should they be necessary, in the Premier's absence.

Speaking of European elites, will the minister who was left in charge while the current Premier vacationed, probably in Europe, in August rise and explain why they did nothing to stop the fourth wave, which was the worst here of anywhere in Canada?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. member is referring to, but what I can tell you is that my Premier – my Premier – shows up for work each and every day. I've sat in cabinet with him for the last two years. He doesn't ever take a day off even when he is taking a day off. I can tell you that the entire summer he was available. He was taking briefings, of course, from the hon. Minister of Health, but he was taking briefings from several other ministers working on major files to be able to move our province forward. So maybe what the difference is: our Premier doesn't take a day off; he gets the job done.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Premier was a complete failure this summer and given that nobody is saying that the Premier didn't deserve a break but given that everyone is saying that it's unacceptable for him to leave no one in charge while he jet-sets off to Europe and given that it's even more disturbing that he would do this in the middle of a public health crisis when modelling was coming from other provinces projecting that Albertans would go through thousands of new cases of COVID every single day, record hospitalizations, to whoever wants to take some responsibility, because there are no briefings in the Premier's calendar: who was Deputy Premier in August? Now is your chance to stand up and apologize for what a mess you've caused.

The Speaker: I might just remind the member to direct her comments through the Speaker. Implying that "you" – you might say "they," but it needs to be through the chair.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

2:10

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has been clear. He was active. During August he was taking briefings. He was in touch with his ministers and senior officials. I can say from personal experience that the Premier never takes a day off. Whether it's a weekend or a weekday, he's on the job. He's delivering to Albertans, and I have continued faith that he will continue to perform in that manner.

Ms Hoffman: Here it is: August 13 to 30, Mr. Speaker.

Given that Albertans had no leadership while preparing for back-to-school and given that they never heard from the Premier or the Minister of Education until it was already too late and given that those two promised a normal school year and that now 7,000 students at least have gotten COVID while at school and given that the best way to gain trust is to be open and honest, will the government pledge to table all of the documents concerning COVID-19 cases in Alberta schools? Stop hiding; start telling the truth.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we have consistently, over and over and over again, told the truth. I know that the member opposite struggles with numbers, particularly when she was trying to quote from a leaked document from AHS, where she kept quoting outbreaks and COVID cases which actually didn't exist. They were illnesses and other gastrointestinal illnesses. In one case she reported 110 at the Stettler school when, in fact, there were only seven COVID cases, creating fear. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hydrogen Strategy

Ms Ganley: Yesterday the Premier promised that today is the day, the day the UCP finally releases its hydrogen strategy, more than a year after our caucus released ours. It's past noon, and there's been nothing but crickets from that side. We know that there's investment and innovation waiting to come to Alberta, but this UCP government won't even take simple steps to remove regulatory barriers and clarify policy for investors. This is an incredible opportunity for the diversification. Why is the associate minister letting it pass us by?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the NDP fails to be encumbered by the truth. I can tell you that my department has been consulting and working hard on the hydrogen road map. We're very excited about this because while there are jurisdictions that make announcements such as net zero and climate emergencies, we're actually coming up with a real plan, a real plan to drive us into a clean energy future. The good news is that the NDP can see all about it on Friday, when we release it.

Ms Ganley: Given that the Premier promised today and that minister didn't deliver and given that last October the associate minister proudly boasted, much to the irritation of several companies, that we don't have water capacity in this province to utilize green hydrogen unless we're planning on using bottled water and given that this sent a signal to investors and job creators that Alberta is not open for this business, can the minister set the record straight, apologize for driving investment away, and commit to a whole-of-government policy to support the hydrogen industry?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that they couldn't spell hydrogen when they were in government. In fact, they had four years to advance a hydrogen economy, and do you know what they did? They did nothing. We had a Dow Chemical announcement, which is a net zero ethane cracker. It will be one of the single largest investments in our province's history. Guess what they had to say about it? Nothing. The silence was deafening. They were threatened by the jobs and the investment. Well, we will launch that hydrogen strategy for all Albertans.

Ms Ganley: Given that Albertans are looking for more than insults from this minister and given that acting too late and doing far too little is this government's approach to everything from renewables to COVID policy and given that there continue to be basic regulatory barriers to developing a market for hydrogen here in Alberta even though there are companies and investors just waiting and excited to move forward, can the associate minister at least commit to doing the absolute bare minimum and removing red tape to allow investment in hydrogen?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that by 2050 there's going to be 350,000 jobs in Canada that are either directly or indirectly involved in the hydrogen industry, and – guess what – we don't have to wait till then to start realizing those jobs. We've already seen four significant announcements this year, all hydrogen related, and – guess what – two of those hydrogen announcements are for export. So, yes, the hydrogen economy is beginning to export in Alberta, and we will be a leader in this clean, affordable energy future. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has the call.

Child and Youth Well-being Review

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you I want to pass on my thanks to the Minister of Children's Services and the Member for Calgary-South East for taking the time to meet with parents and children over the last five months. Many of my constituents have expressed deep concerns over the impact the pandemic and health-related measures have had on our children. We know that children across the province have struggled mentally, emotionally, as well as physically throughout this pandemic. To the minister: what kind of response from Albertans have you received through this panel review?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the past five months our panel of experts as well as the MLA for Calgary-South East and I have met with educators, community partners, parents, caregivers, and youth in a number of ways to better understand the impacts that the pandemic and the related health measures have had on young people across the province. We engaged in 31 round-table discussions – 15 of those were led by MLAs in this Chamber – we had six telephone town halls, two public surveys to which 9,716 Albertans responded. We heard from parents, experts, community partners, and young people, and I do look forward to their final report.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for that tremendous effort. Given that on June 7 I stood before this House to talk about the child and youth well-being review and five months later I continue to advocate for our children and youth across this province and given that as a parent of four wonderful children I continue to see the impact this pandemic has had on their well-being and their mental health, to the same minister: when can Albertans expect to see the recommendations for this child and youth wellness panel review?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the member's passion and always speaking up for children and youth in Alberta. As I mentioned, the review panel has been working hard over the last five months to gather and analyze all of the feedback that was provided and then pooling that together into recommendations that we will be receiving this fall. I am absolutely confident that when the report and recommendations are public, we will have concrete steps to better address some of the challenges our children and youth have been facing. We have and will continue to work across ministries and with community partners to ensure kids and families have access to supports and services they need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the data emerging from around the world indicates a decline in mental, physical, and social health for our children during the pandemic and given that our children have sacrificed 20 months to help limit the spread, further given that features of the panel were to understand psychological, social, educational, and physical outcomes of the pandemic on our children and youth, to the same minister: how will the findings of this panel impact Alberta's youth going forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, to quote the Minister of Service Alberta, I want to say that you can't fix what you don't measure. This review represented an opportunity to gather evidence and hear Albertans' perspectives about the impacts of the pandemic and related health measures while at the same time providing timely advice and insight to help us chart a path forward. We then have a responsibility to take this feedback and work across government and alongside community partners to help better support children and youth where they're at. I'm grateful for all the Albertans that participated and the panelists for their hand in this important work as well as their time and expertise, and I do look forward to receiving the report.

Indigenous Consultation on Government Policies

Mr. Feehan: This government proudly unveiled the report they said backed their calls for a provincial police force even though Albertans are opposed, municipalities are opposed, the cost is astronomical, and they failed to consult Indigenous communities entirely. The confederacy of Treaty Six said that they were not included in the discussions about the police force and that they have major questions about the massive costs and the very idea in and of itself. Can the Minister of Indigenous Relations explain why Indigenous partners were not consulted about this horrible provincial police force plot?

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

2:20

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that between July and September I was travelling across our province meeting with municipal leaders, chambers of commerce, ordinary Albertans, and indeed First Nation communities and their leaders as well. I have now directed my department to embark on a fulsome consultation with Indigenous leaders, municipal leaders across our province, and that consultation begins this month, November. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Feehan: Given that from day one this government has made it clear that they view consultation and involving Indigenous communities in major policy decisions as an afterthought and given that it's no wonder that Indigenous communities don't trust this government with consultation when this government doesn't even want to count their votes and given that this government did not provide on-reserve voting for the referendums attached to the municipal election ballots, can the minister tell us how many Indigenous people were denied a vote on those referendums and why he thinks denying consultation and voter suppression of Indigenous people is acceptable?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member is wrong. During the municipal election we went to great pains to provide voting opportunity for every Indigenous person in Alberta. In many cases, if we couldn't get a polling station on the reserve or on the nation, the neighbouring municipality did it, and when that wasn't possible, there were mail-in ballots available to every single person. So I hope the hon. member will consider this education and not repeat what he just said. [interjection]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:21.

Mr. Feehan: Given that this government is promoting a racist, anti-Indigenous curriculum where every child doesn't matter although they should, given that this government didn't consult on that curriculum or the provincial police force and refused to pull the earplugs out when Indigenous leaders called them out for being cut off from voting in the referendums two weeks ago, my last question to the minister is a simple one. Have you given up on Indigenous rights entirely?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems the member is quite angry today, and I can understand why. As I've travelled across the province and we've been making announcements and making them partners in prosperity and now partners in reconciliation, all I hear about is that they were around. They were there for the photo ops but no action. No action over here. That's what we're really focusing on, getting action, because that's what they want. They want to see action, and that's what we did with our community research grant. I went to the other ministers. I got help. We raised \$8 million for a community research grant. We created a garden down there, and that was very appropriate, Chief Billy Morin told me.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:23.

Rural Bus Service

Mr. Dach: Once again, Mr. Speaker, we see this government ignoring Alberta businesses that are struggling to survive. When Greyhound pulled out, Cold Shot stepped up to the plate to serve rural Albertans and provide essential bus services like getting grandmothers to their medical appointments. They were an Alberta success story, growing their business, and then the pandemic hit. Now they are struggling to survive. Sunny, the founder of Cold Shot, is an Alberta champion, but he is being ignored by this Minister of Transportation, and his business is running on fumes. Why is the minister abandoning Cold Shot and rural Albertans when they need her help?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking intercity bus companies who have provided this vital service not only during the pandemic but for generations and continue to do so. While I appreciate the predicament that private bus lines find themselves in, Alberta's government does not provide direct operational subsidies to private companies, including bus services. However, I have directed my department to work with companies to help them apply for applicable federal and provincial relief programs that would help keep buses on the road.

Mr. Dach: Wow. Pointing them to the federal government.

Now, given that the Alberta government previously provided Cold Shot and other essential rural bus providers with operating funding when Greyhound failed and given that Cold Shot supports the most vulnerable Albertans, those that are too old to drive or can't afford insurance for their vehicles, and given that this government has found loads of money for their friends and insiders and pet projects like the war room, to the Minister of Transportation. Explain to this House how this government could possibly let the system of rural transportation fail and abandon rural Alberta. How is this not your job? Why is it up to the federal government to fix it?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the province supported municipal transportation needs to ensure public services are available for

citizens, and that was done through the safe restart grant through the federal government and through the province match. Federal funding helps support communities and the important services provided to residents who rely on bus service to get to work and to school.

Mr. Dach: Given that Cold Shot delivers an essential service to rural Albertans and given that it's so essential in British Columbia that the government there found more than a hundred thousand dollars to support Cold Shot to fund their B.C. rural bus network and keep it going and given that Cold Shot is not asking for a lot, just enough to survive, and given that even *Calgary Herald* columnist and loyal supporter of the Premier Licia Corbella is saying that the Cold Shot decision is just more evidence of a "tone-deaf" government that is "out of step with Albertans," what will it take for the minister to tune in, acknowledge the crisis, and fix this mess?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the pandemic has been hard on Albertans, including small businesses. I have directed my department to work with the company in question so that they can be aware of the suite of supports that are available for small businesses. We will be in touch with the company indicated and see what we can do in terms of working with them together.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a question.

Surgery Wait Times Health Care Services in Camrose

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in July the previous Minister of Health and I hosted a Zoom call with the Camrose medical community. We discussed the growing backlog of nonurgent and urgent surgeries and what help is needed from the province. These physicians have indicated their willingness to perform additional surgeries to help the province catch up with the backlog that we are currently experiencing. Will the minister work with the medical community of Camrose to provide surgical procedures and reduce the backlog created by COVID?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much to the hon. member for the question. First of all, I want to thank our health care workers for everything they have done over the past 20 months in responding to COVID. Soon we will present a plan to get Alberta back on track to a hundred per cent of our normal surgical capacity and catch up on those that have been postponed. We're already taking steps to make sure that every Albertan receives scheduled surgeries within appropriate time frames via the Alberta surgical initiative. Boosting health system capacity, including surgical capacity, is one of my stated priorities as Minister of Health, and I'm absolutely willing to work with physicians in Camrose and across the province to get this done.

Ms Lovely: Given that we do not have an ICU unit in St. Mary's hospital and it is hard for us to receive surgical treatments in a timely manner and given that COVID has made it increasingly difficult for many to receive urgent surgeries, let alone nonurgent, and many are finding themselves travelling to Edmonton or Red Deer, a struggle known all too well for those who have the inability to travel long distances, just to be there to support loved ones, will the minister provide us with an update on the types of surgeries that will be available for my region?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand just how much a burden travel can be, particularly for medical reasons. Many Albertans have found themselves having to travel for surgeries lately. As we are able to shift resources within the health care system from COVID to other health priorities, it is my hope that we are able to get as many Albertans for surgeries as close as possible. The fact is that we just don't have the capacity right now to provide as many surgeries close to home as we might have, but as our case numbers decline, hospitalization and ICU admissions drop, we will see that capacity return.

Ms Lovely: Given that Camrose is a regional hub for many medical treatments and we are seeing a growing number of cases that require the resources that an ICU unit provides and given that St. Mary's hospital is important to Camrose and the region it serves and the population relies on the hospital's continued growth and it is crucial that the hospital can meet its demands, how will the minister work with the Camrose hospital foundation and its regional medical community on getting an ICU built for the region of Camrose?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank everyone who has ever been part of their local hospital foundation and volunteered their time and resources to help support the health of Albertans. As the hon. member knows, St. Mary's is operated by Covenant Health. As I said earlier, Alberta's government is willing to work with any community group in the province to build health care capacity. That includes making investments to ensure every Albertan can access surgeries within an appropriate time frame through the Alberta surgical initiative. Our government will carefully consider the needs of Camrose and the region it serves when making those investment decisions.

2:30 Addiction, Mental Health, and Homeless Supports

Member Irwin: I've shared in this House many times the dire need for investments in housing in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and, in fact, across the province. At least 1,200 more Edmontonians are experiencing homelessness than at the start of the pandemic. Many folks are choosing not to sleep in shelters. They don't feel welcome there. They don't feel safe. Many are living in tents. We learned last week of another person dying in the Kinnaird ravine. To the minister. This is an absolute crisis. I don't want another houseless person to die. I need you to commit right now to investing in permanent supportive housing. It will save lives. Will you?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member raising this very important question here. Our government committed to supporting people who have homeless situations. In last year's budget we committed \$49 million in homeless support alone. Last year in the Edmonton region we invested another \$8 million and created 400 permanent shelter places for the homeless population. We're taking action and addressing this issue. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Irwin: Many folks who are houseless in our communities are also struggling with addiction, and I see daily the impacts of the opioid crisis. Four Albertans are dying a day. Four a day. We proposed in June an evidence-based emergency plan, which included expanding supervised consumption services across the province and addressing safe supply. We're urging this government

to implement it before more lives are lost. Why won't the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions adopt our plan or any plan? Why does he refuse to do anything except yell in this Chamber? His inaction makes him complicit.

Mr. Ellis: Well, the former government, Mr. Speaker, were the kings and queens of doing nothing on this particular issue. The opioid epidemic has hit Albertans hard. It's been hitting Albertans hard for years and years and years. There's a comprehensive approach which includes supervised consumption sites. I think they really need to understand how addiction works. We help people survive, and we eventually get them into treatment to ensure that they can live their lives again. Why do the members opposite continue to want to keep people in perpetual states of self-harm?

Member Irwin: Incredibly heartbreaking, and the message that you're sending to families is just unbelievable. Maybe it would help, Minister, if you saw first-hand just how many people are struggling in my riding 10 blocks east of here. I'd love to walk you through Chinatown, Boyle Street, McCauley, the ravine, Dawson park. We'll see people. We'll talk to people in encampments. We'll see people struggling. You'll see folks using, but you'll also see the value of harm reduction and the work being done by groups like Bear Clan Patrol, water warriors, Boots on the Ground street team. All of them are addressing gaps that are caused by your government's inaction. My question is simple: will you walk with me in my constituency?

Mr. Ellis: I've been on the streets in that community. I have been to the Spady centre in that community. You know, Mr. Speaker, I only have a few seconds here, but let me tell you a story about a young lady I met in a recovery centre. I asked her. I said, "Why are you here?" She said, "I want to get back to my one-year-old little daughter." Why do the members opposite want to prevent this lady from getting back to her little girl? Why do they want to prevent that little girl from having their mother again?

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Ellis: Shame on them.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:34.

Mr. Schow: Point of order. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. An additional point of order is noted at 2:34. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Support for Agriculture

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year has been especially tough for farmers and ranchers because of this drought. Temperatures exceeded 35 degrees for extended periods of time. Farmers and ranchers questioned if it was worth even harvesting their fields, and livestock owners had to decide if they would cull their herds. When we asked the minister to have a plan in place in the dry season, we were ignored. The supports the government did provide were far too little and came in far too late. When will the government stop ignoring Alberta farmers and ranchers, and what supports will this minister start bringing in to provide immediate aid?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know we just had Halloween, but there's nothing scarier to rural Alberta

than an NDP government, so thankfully we haven't been able to see that for quite some time. To the member's question, when it comes to AgriRecovery, that was something that we negotiated with the federal government, \$340 million of support payments for our livestock industry, that was going through extreme drought conditions this year, as well as \$2 billion, we anticipate, that'll go out in crop insurance payouts. Yes, it was an extremely difficult year this year for our agriculture community, but this government is taking it seriously and doing everything we can to support our ag community.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for admitting that the payouts have not been given out.

Given that more people need access to financial supports because of this drought and given that the UCP made cuts to AFSC, although the UCP minister will deny these cuts, and given that many farmers have still not had their claims processed – many have still not received relief; it's been months, and it's shameful – will the minister commit to reversing the changes made to AFSC, and will he commit that every claim will be settled by the end of this month? Twenty-nine days, Minister. I think you can do it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unlike my colleague the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, I will try to make those timelines work. It's something that – AFSC has been a great entity for farmers. They've always been there. When we have difficulties, weather in this type of year, they're always going to be there assessing the claims. Yes, there are more claims than normal due to the drought this year, but AFSC – we had crop adjusters out there as soon as possible so that you could actually take the crops off early and convert it into livestock feed. Yes, it's a lot of work that AFSC has been doing, but they're on top of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, given that the cost to producers for the upcoming season will have significant financial impacts on agricultural producers and given that the Premier himself last week acknowledged that commodity prices are high for those who are able to have yields this year, although many are not seeing the benefits of today's market because of low yields or no yields, and given that those prices will increase the cost of seed – it's also going to exceed past cost margins and cause significant financial burdens for farmers – and given that this will cause some farmers to exceed their business capital, would the minister be willing to look at an emergency drought loan guarantee for producers to access so that they can prepare for next season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On an earlier question that the member had on payments not actually going out to farmers through AgriRecovery, I just wanted to inform this House that as of a couple of weeks ago they actually processed over 7,000 applications, and that was worth about \$121 million going out to our livestock producers. Yes, we are taking this drought seriously and doing everything we can to support our farmers, and we will continue to do so. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a question.

Emergency Medical Service Response Times

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Local EMS workers have raised concerns regarding a shortage of ambulances and compounding issues with the provincial EMS system. Given that wait times in Airdrie have continued to increase since 2019 and over the last six months by 30 per cent, to an average response time of nine minutes and 45 seconds, and that in recent years the fire department arrives on scene before ambulances for a significant number of medical calls, Minister, what is Alberta's government doing to address the shortages of ambulances in Airdrie and the rest of the province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. AHS has increased the number of paramedic positions by 9 per cent since 2019. Albertans can be confident that EMS will always respond. If you call, they will come. Like the rest of our health system, the EMS system is under incredible stress right now. Despite a surge in calls of over 30 per cent above prepandemic levels EMS continues to prioritize the most critical patients for immediate care. Yes, calls have increased over the hon. member's riding year over year, but I understand that response times now have stabilized. That's a sign of progress.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that numerous code reds have been called throughout 2021, which happens when there are no ambulances in the region to respond to medical emergencies, and given that in those cases resources are borrowed from other municipalities and regions or the fire department's co-response, which comes at an added cost to municipalities like Airdrie, Minister, what is the government doing to ensure faster response times for ambulances?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of steps that have been taken recently to address this issue. New initiatives like lifting the cap on overtime and alternative destinations are helping create capacity so that the system can prioritize patient hand-off and get EMS back on the streets faster. Mobile integrated health teams are helping to reduce the need for transportation altogether by providing in-house care and support. AHS has hired more staff, and I understand that 100 temporary paramedic positions were made permanent. That's 300 added positions since 2019. The goal is to bring those response times down, and that's what we'll do.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for your attention on this matter. Given that Alberta's ambulance crisis did not start yesterday and given that there is a clear need for paramedics and more ambulances to meet the demand of our communities and further given that there are extended wait times in times of crisis and emergency events and that our paramedic teams are stretched thin across the province – my constituents are worried that an ambulance won't be there when needed – Minister, what additional steps are you doing to support the paramedic teams in and around Airdrie?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the items alluded to by the hon. member is burnout, and that is a very real concern. The EMS hours of work project is being rolled out to help address some of the issues regarding fatigue, and I encourage anyone who thinks they may be nearing a point of fatigue and having concerns

with mental health to reach out. AHS also offers a full suite of mental health services and supports for employees. But the best way to address burnout is to provide the Alberta EMS system with resiliency and flexibility to manage whatever challenges emerge. That is one of my key priorities as Minister of Health, and I look forward to working with the hon. member to build capacity in Airdrie and around the province.

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

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Bill 79 Trails Act

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I lost my glasses; let's start with that. I'm pleased to rise today to move first reading of Bill 79, the Trails Act.

Mr. Speaker, if this bill is passed, the act would modernize how Alberta's trails are managed while conserving the environment and improving recreational experiences for all Albertans. The Trails Act will help to care for trails and make them safer by ensuring that they're managed properly, designated for specific uses like hiking or riding off-highway vehicles. The act will also give us better enforcement tools to promote conservation and environmental stewardship across our public lands.

I hope all members of the House will support this legislation, and, Mr. Speaker, with that, I ask that we move first reading of Bill 79.

[Motion carried; Bill 79 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a tabling.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today in my questions I referred to the Premier's calendar for the dates of August 12 through 30, and I'm tabling those as I referred to them in my questions.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Dreeshen, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, pursuant to the Agriculture Financial Services Act the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation 2020-21 annual report; pursuant to the Farm Implement and Dealership Act the Farmers' Advocate office annual report 2020-21.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:21 the hon. Deputy Government House Leader rose, called a point of order while the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was speaking.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order called against the Member for St. Albert. At the time that you had outlined, that member, I believe, called across the aisle to the hon. Minister of Transportation when he was speaking. This is under

23(h), (i), and (j). That member said specifically: you should be embarrassed. This language is certainly unparliamentary. This member is no stranger to points of order. This member has been called a number of times on using language that is certainly unbecoming of a member of this Chamber. It should not be allowed and allowed to persist. I encourage that member to apologize and withdraw that remark and in the future raise the bar.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did not hear the Member for St. Albert say anything unparliamentary. I do not believe this to be a point of order, rather a very heated debate within the House, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm prepared to rule. I also was unable to hear any comments that may or may not have been made off the record. I would encourage members, if they are heckling, do so wittily and cleverly in a way that is parliamentary should they be choosing to engage in such behaviours. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:34 the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall rose on a point of order during the questioning from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. The Opposition House Leader has risen to argue the point.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly making allegations and imputing false or unavowed motives, during the exchange the minister who was responding to questions repeatedly essentially accused the opposition of wanting people to stay unwell, to not receive treatment. Then he specifically accused the opposition of wanting to prevent a little girl from seeing her mother again, preventing a mother from being able to go home to their children. We engage in vigorous debate here in this Chamber, but the rhetoric we're hearing from that minister borders on completely unparliamentary and offensive. It will certainly create disorder in this House.

There are four people a day dying from the opioid crisis, and the government is closing safe consumption sites and not supporting a harm reduction method. The Official Opposition has genuine questions based in making sure that the humans we represent stay alive and receive treatment. To be accused that we want to prevent children from seeing their parents is beyond the pale. I believe that this is a point of order, that the member went too far with his rhetoric. I would request that he apologize and withdraw, that we debate the facts in this place without accusing one another of wanting to cause harm to Albertans.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I do find it rich that the member opposite would rise on this point of order to make such a claim. I find this is a matter of debate, and I'll tell you why. The hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions was saying that policies espoused by the members opposite were effectively keeping someone from their daughter. He did not outline specifically what member on that side of the House was doing that. The reason why I find this rich is that regularly – regularly – the Member for Edmonton-City Centre accuses the government, for policies that we've implemented, of killing Albertans.

I agree with you, Mr. Speaker. It is important to raise the level of decorum. But if the member opposite and the hon. Opposition House Leader is going to rise on this point of order and suggest that this language is somehow offensive or frustrating for them to hear, I would encourage them to maybe espouse the same level of

decorum that she's asking for in this point of order. This is not a point of order. This is a matter of debate.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule on the point of order. I appreciate the submissions by both sides of the Assembly, and I think you both have made some very valid points. Perhaps all members of the Assembly could take your arguments to heart when making accusations about the other side of the House and what they intend or don't intend to do.

I would agree that suggesting that members of the opposition want to keep a mother from their child borders on unparliamentary because, of course, they don't. I would also agree that there have been times in this House where members of the opposition have suggested that members of the government are responsible for killing people, and of course they aren't. I encourage all members of the Assembly to raise the level of decorum and debate in this place, and I consider this a cautionary tale to all members. The matter is dealt with and concluded.

2:50

At 2:34 the hon. Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Preambles

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your words of caution.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, this point of order was actually called on two matters that happened very close to each other, the first of which was that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was asking that member's second or first supplemental, if I'm mistaken, but it was, in fact, a supplemental, and nowhere in that supplemental did I hear a "given," rather just a very long preamble. It's a long-standing tradition in this Chamber that we do not have preambles in first or second supplemental questions, and I do believe that this is a point of order that should be drawn as an example or a cautionary tale, to use your language, for future questions.

The second . . .

The Speaker: Well, let's deal with the first.

Mr. Schow: Certainly.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader, should you choose to respond. Or I'm prepared to rule.

Ms Gray: Please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I would wholeheartedly agree with your assessment of what is a preamble or what isn't. I do have the benefit of the Blues. All members heard the question. I think it was very clear that this is a perfect example of a preamble and with very little attempt to not make that. I'm not sure a preamble is an apology-required type of offence. I'm sure that the Opposition House Leader will provide some feedback to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that this question certainly is beyond the bounds of what is acceptable in the Assembly with respect to preambles.

On your second matter.

Point of Order Remarks off the Record

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on something similar to my first point of order. I suspect that unless you yourself heard it, you may rule against it, but I think it is very important to

put this on the record. The language used in this Chamber must be elevated. While the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions was speaking and responding to a member opposite's question, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud clearly yelled across the aisle: you're a coward.

Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity to disagree without being disagreeable in this Chamber, and that is our job as legislators, to bring the highest level of debate into these seats. I anticipate that at times members may cross a line and they may say something inappropriate, and for those things we should apologize. In this instance that Member for Edmonton-Whitemud should apologize for saying something that is grossly unparliamentary to an associate minister of the Crown. This is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions was using the highest level of debate in accusing the opposition of wanting to keep children from their parents, I did not hear a heckle from either the Member of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or the Member of Edmonton-Whitemud. The Deputy Government House Leader just accused two of my members of being the one to shout, so I would suggest that this is not a point of order – it's not clear to me which member he thinks caused this heckle as he named two – and he speaks about an elevated level of debate while his Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions accuses us of wanting to keep children from their parents.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, there's a point of clarification there. I was specifically referring to Edmonton-Whitemud.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. It was clear to me, and your opportunity to clarify is if I was to address you, which I didn't, but I appreciate that you have.

Mr. Schow: Apologies.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to rule. Well, if in fact the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud or otherwise did say that the associate minister is a coward, then they should apologize because for their comments on or off the record each member needs to be held accountable. Having said that, I did not hear a comment of that variety. The House was very ruckus this afternoon, and I was unable to hear. The Speaker would never make a ruling on a comment made off the record that he was unable to hear. I consider this matter not a point of order, and it is dealt with and concluded.

We're at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

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

Senate Nominees

103. Mr. Madu moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that pursuant to the Alberta Senate Election Act over 1.1 million Albertans participated in the October 18, 2021, election of nominees for the Senate of Canada,
- (b) congratulate the three candidates who received the greatest number of votes – Pam Davidson, Erika

Barootes, and Mykhailo Martyniuk – and recognize these candidates as Alberta's nominees for the Senate of Canada, and

- (c) call on the Prime Minister to respect the democratic decision of Albertans by recommending to Her Majesty the Queen that two of these nominees be summoned to the Senate of Canada to fill Alberta's two vacant seats.

Mr. Madu: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I do want to echo the Premier's statement and congratulate Alberta's three Senate nominees.

The Speaker: I just would like some clarity from you, Minister. Are you moving this motion on behalf of the hon. the Government House Leader, Government Motion 103?

Mr. Madu: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for that temporary delay there. I want, on behalf of the Government House Leader and the Premier, to move Motion 103.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

This is a debatable motion. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to rise today on this motion because when Albertans are looking for leadership in our province, we see a government that is unfocused on the people of Alberta and instead focusing on federal politics. Albertans need jobs. Albertans need an economic recovery. They need prosperity. Albertans need stable education. They need investment in our health care system. They need a government that's going to listen to their needs and priorities.

This motion does none of those things. It focuses on none of Albertans' priorities. This is not the business that this government was elected to serve, not in 2019 and certainly not right now, in the midst of a global pandemic. It's not surprising that seemingly every minister in this government is focused on the wrong things. The priorities and judgment of this government are so flawed and out of step with what Albertans want, need, and are asking for. So today we're wasting time debating a meaningless motion that the Premier hopes will distract from the incompetence of this government to provide the most basic services to Albertans.

This government approved in Treasury Board to spend up to \$10 million on this referendum, \$10 million on a fake job in a fake Senate. This motion is asking us as the representatives of Albertans in the Assembly, which is supposed to focus on the urgent needs of the day and for our future, to recommend that three individuals be appointed to the federal Senate. This would be an appointment for a position to be held until the age of 75, making more than \$157,000 a year. The minister of environment and the Government House Leader is asking this Assembly to recommend three people for these positions. Here's the percentage of eligible voters that actually voted in this fake referendum. The first candidate received 13.5 per cent of the vote; the second candidate, 12.7; and the third candidate only 10.2 per cent.

Let's call this motion and this campaign by this government what it is, an attempt by a failing Premier and a failing government to

distract from the real issues. Countless hours have been spent in this Chamber debating Canada's Senate, the value of the institution, the best method for selection of the Senators. *Hansard* has pages upon pages of discussion on the bills and motions, and today's debate will add to it.

3:00

The position of the Alberta NDP on the Senate has been made clear through these debates. The Senate is unfair to Alberta. Alberta is underrepresented in the Senate, and, perhaps worse, it's an institution that guards privilege and the elite. Its role in passing legislation is undemocratic, and the legislation it passes too often affects Alberta negatively, for example, when we saw Bill C-69, with the Senate meaninglessly rubber-stamping this bill.

But that's not what we're debating today. If this government focused on using Albertans' money in a responsible manner, we could have debated the cost borne by Albertans on this meaningless Senate election. Albertans are looking for a government that will get to work and focus on the economic prosperity of the province. Albertans want to know that they can pay their mortgage, that their businesses won't go under, that they won't be evicted from their businesses in the middle of a global pandemic, that their children will have good and safe schools to go to, that their parents will have safe elder care, that their family will have access to quality health care. Instead, Mr. Speaker, we have today a Premier who has been sitting in his sky palace sipping on Jameson, a motion from the Government House Leader, and a government cabinet that is so out of touch with average Albertans.

Several times in this Legislature our Official Opposition has raised concerns with the privileged, antidemocratic, and money-wasting Senate. Albertans know that this system is inherently flawed and needs a significant institutional restructuring, but right now Albertans don't need a debate on this issue. They need leadership, they need action, and they need a government that is focused on what Albertans need and priorities. This motion, like this government and this Premier, fails to lead Alberta on the issues that matter to us most.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Motion 103, moved by the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General on behalf of the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and Government House Leader.

Mr. Speaker, I echo the statements of many regarding Senate nominees and a congratulatory word to them. Running in a campaign is no small feat. It takes a lot of mental energy, a lot of physical energy, a lot of support from your closest, and, of course, going and soliciting support from others you may or may not know. The point of me saying that is that there is a ton of work that goes into campaigns. Everyone in this Chamber knows that and recognizes it. I do extend heartfelt congratulations to the three Senate nominee candidates.

Albertans have told us repeatedly that they wanted a greater say in the issues that affect them and a bigger voice in the business of government. Two weeks ago, thanks to the actions of the United Conservative government, that is exactly what happened. Albertans were very clear about who they want to represent them. They chose Pam Davidson, Erika Barootes, and Mykhailo Martyniuk. I offer my sincere congratulations on their successful campaigns, and I thank them for offering themselves to the service of Albertans.

This election continued a more than two-decades-old tradition of Albertans electing who they feel would best represent their interests in Canada's upper House. Mr. Speaker, unlike the mistakes made in the past, this government made sure this voting, which underpins the basic concept of the great Alberta democracy, would continue to take place by reinstating Senate nomination elections in 2019, when this government passed the Alberta Senate Election Act.

Since 1989 Alberta voters have nominated 10 candidates in four elections for appointment to the Red Chamber. Over this period five of those nominees were appointed to the Senate by previous federal governments. Of Alberta's five sitting Senators right now, only two were democratically elected, that is, of course, Senator Doug Black and Senator Scott Tannas. That's to say that fewer than half of Alberta's representatives in the Senate have a real mandate set by real Albertans. That needs to change. Albertans have made clear that they expect the federal government to appoint the Senators that they want, and it only follows logically.

Mr. Speaker, elected Senators have a greater democratic legitimacy because of the mandate they receive from voters. Imagine for a moment the previous election, in 2019, and a system in Alberta whereby the party that wins the most seats gets to pick all the members of the Chamber. That is not democratic. The members opposite ran hard on their election platform. The members opposite won their seats. That's democracy and something that we should respect.

Mr. Speaker, elected Senators have a greater democratic legitimacy because of the mandate that they receive from voters. Albertans are smart, and they understand this fact, and it's why they voted in the Senate election. This United Conservative government understands that fact as well. These three individuals who were elected for the Senate – congratulations to them – know this fact as well. That's why they ran, because they felt that democracy should rule and reign supreme. It's time for the federal government to recognize this undeniable fact.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage every member of this House and my colleagues across the aisle to listen to Albertans. To vote against this motion would be voting against the will of Albertans. Whether you like the principle of Senate elections in Alberta or not is, frankly, irrelevant. Albertans were given an opportunity to voice their concerns and voice their feelings about who should represent them in the upper Chamber in Ottawa, and as elected members of this Chamber we should respect that. I would find it, frankly, quite interesting if members opposite actually voted against this motion.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we must support and we must endorse these election results in the Senate election. We know that Albertans are not getting a fair deal, but the least the federal government can do is respect the Senate elections and appoint the Senators that have won those votes. We also know that Ottawa continues to ignore the voices of the west and those in this great province. In the last federal election Albertans did not buy what the Prime Minister was selling them. Overwhelmingly, Albertans voted for a different direction and demanded fairness in Confederation. That is why I'm urging the Prime Minister to show humility and appoint the nominees Albertans have elected to fill their vacancies in the upper Chamber.

Alberta Senate seats belong to Albertans, not to Ottawa, Mr. Speaker. Let me be clear. This is not a question of partisan identity; it is a question of our democratic identity. Either you believe in it, or you don't. Albertans have been abundantly clear on the issue of fairness. They want a fair deal, but more clearly they deserve a fair deal. Frankly, they've earned a fair deal. Albertans have been net contributors for decades to this province's equalization formula. We have worked our tails off to ensure that our contributions are such that they help other provinces, who need to deliver essential

services like health care and education, to keep their services on par with the rest of the country, that they're not falling behind.

All we've asked for, Mr. Speaker, is a fair deal, and all we ask for in this instance is for the federal government to respect democracy and the democratic voices of Albertans. The Prime Minister can ignore the desires of Albertans for their future at his own peril, but it is not his political future that this question affects. Democratic fairness shakes the very core of our federation. Too often Albertans have been left behind by their federal government, and it needs to stop. The election of Senate nominees is an expression of Albertans and their desire to reform the Red Chamber. That democracy can take root in an institution that for so long has left them unfairly represented.

I call on the federal government to not let Albertans' call for fairness and democracy go unheard or unanswered. I urge this House to resoundingly make their demands heard by Ottawa. Mr. Speaker, think of the message it would send to Ottawa if in a unified voice 87 members of this Chamber voted in favour of democracy, the power that that would send. This is not a partisan issue, as I earlier stated. This is a matter of respecting the democratic will of Albertans, and I encourage members on this side and the opposite side to respect that as well.

3:10

In closing, I will simply say this. Thank you to all those who ran for the Senate. To those candidates who were unsuccessful, there are opportunities, I'm certain, in the future to run again. That is the way that democracy works. I respect all of them for putting their name on the ballot. Most importantly, I congratulate the three Senate nominees from Alberta on their victory, and I want to thank everyone for engaging in this debate. Finally, I'd like to say: God bless the people of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate on this? I see the hon. Premier has risen.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague from Cardston-Siksika for his excellent remarks. I am pleased to rise in debate on the following motion to

- (a) recognize that pursuant to the Alberta Senate Election Act over 1.1 million Albertans participated in the October 18, 2021, election of nominees for the Senate of Canada,
- (b) congratulate the three candidates who received the greatest number of votes – Pam Davidson, Erika Barootes, and Mykhailo Martyniuk – and recognize these candidates as Alberta's nominees for the Senate of Canada, and
- (c) call on the Prime Minister to respect the democratic decision of Albertans by recommending to Her Majesty the Queen that two of these nominees be summoned to the Senate of Canada to fill Alberta's two vacant seats.

Plain and simple, this is about democracy, representation by the people. It is not complicated, and I am astonished to see that the NDP opposite, which has the word "democratic" in its party name, opposes the fundamental core principle of democracy, which is for representatives to be elected to represent people. They're actually laughing, Mr. Speaker, laughing at the principle of democracy. I don't understand how they can call themselves a democratic party when they believe that one person alone, the Prime Minister of Canada, should be able to choose who represents us and 4.5 million Albertans in the Parliament of Canada. It's 2021.

This is not a complicated principle. It's a principle that has become a convention, a tradition, a custom in Alberta over the past 23 years. In fact, it was in 1989 that Bill 1, the Senatorial Selection Act, was introduced on June 6 of that year and received third reading on August 15. Both opposition parties voted against the bill – that's not surprising, Mr. Speaker – but when the bill received

royal assent on August 18, the stage was finally set for Canada's first Senate election, which occurred on October 16, 1989.

In introducing the Senatorial Selection Act in this place, my predecessor the late hon. Don Getty said:

Mr. Speaker, the important principle in this Bill is to allow, for the first time in Canadian history, all of the people of Alberta to select for the government of Alberta and the government of Canada the person who the people believe should represent them in the Senate. We believe choosing a Senator by popular election will not only provide a stronger voice for Alberta but will lead to a better and a more united Canada.

Premier Don Getty, February 1989, in this place.

That legislation was adopted in August of that year, and the province proceeded in the autumn, October 16, 1989, to hold its first Senate election. The winner of that election was the late Hon. Stan Waters, who previously had served with great distinction as commander of the Canadian Army, a highly distinguished Second World War veteran and hero and a great Alberta business leader.

Stan Waters won that election in October 1989, with 259,000 votes, as a candidate for the Reform Party of Canada, and he went on to be appointed by the then Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Brian Mulroney, who recommended to Her Majesty the Queen that Senator Waters be summoned to the Senate.

On June 11, 1990, former Prime Minister Mulroney said the following, quote: the agreement signed in Ottawa on June 9 is an important step in accelerating the process of Senate reform; the extraordinary procedure by which Mr. Stan Waters was selected was also intended to advance the cause of Senate reform, which is why I believe it is important that this unique appointment be made. Unquote. Credit to Premier Getty and his government, Prime Minister Mulroney and his government for having the courage to embrace reform, democratic reform.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a conservative. I believe in the great value of preserving institutions, particularly in our political context, this great parliamentary institution and the entire Westminster tradition. I acknowledge with respect that when the founders of Canada, the Fathers of Confederation, laid out the structure of our political institutions at the Quebec Conference in 1865, that were subsequently enshrined in the Constitution Act, the British North America Act of 1867, they chose an upper Chamber that would in many respects reflect the House of Lords in the Westminster Parliament because, as it says in the British North America Act, Canada is to have a system of government that resembles in principle that of the Westminster British system.

I understand the desire in the 19th century to maintain a kind of quasi-aristocratic upper Chamber. At that time there was great suspicion about what was called popular democracy. There was a view that the landowning class, Mr. Speaker, had to have a check and a balance against the democratic impulses reflected by the elected members of the lower House. That is in part why – but there's another reason, actually, why, I believe. If you read them deeply, the debates around the Quebec Conference and the framing of the Canadian Constitution, many of the leaders of Confederation such as Sir John A. Macdonald were suspicious of an elected upper Chamber because they were concerned that elected representatives for the regions and provinces in the upper Chamber would compete with the Prime Minister and cabinet for political authority and legitimacy in the lower House. In other words, they wanted complete power residing in the lower House, specifically in the executive branch in the lower House. They didn't want to legitimate, to grant greater political legitimacy, to elected Senators in the upper Chamber. But part of it also was this notion of protecting the interests of the landowning class.

Isn't it remarkable that here we – fast-forward to 2021, and who is holding on to this antiquated 19th-century version of parliamentary democracy? The New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker, which has to take out their smelling salts when we suggest that people should be popularly elected to represent them in the Parliament of Canada. They just can't broaden their minds to conceive of that.

Now, I should say that, coming back to the history of what brings us here today, regrettably the late Stan Waters passed away just, I think, 18 months following his appointment, tragically. So the next Senate election occurred in October 1998. Bert Brown was the top vote-getter, with 333,000 votes, and Ted Morton, my friend, was the second-place candidate, with 274,000 votes. Now, of course, Prime Minister Harper went on to appoint Mr. Brown to the Senate of Canada when he became Prime Minister in July 2007, because there was a third Senate election.

3:20

What actually happened – I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker – was that those two candidates elected in 1998 were not appointed by then Prime Minister Chrétien, and eventually their terms lapsed. So the government of Alberta, then the government of the late Premier Ralph Klein, held its third Senate election on November 22, 2004, this time with Bert Brown coming in first again, with 312,000 votes. Betty Unger, a dear friend of mine, a retired nurse here in Edmonton, came second with 312,000 votes, and Cliff Breitzkreuz, a farmer from West Yellowhead, came third with 241,000 votes. Prime Minister Harper, as one of his first acts as soon as there was an Alberta vacancy, appointed Bert Brown, who had very patiently waited for all those years.

Let us pause in this debate to pay tribute to the late Bert Brown, the founder of the Triple E Senate Committee, the man who famously plowed three Es into his farm field near Cremona to create a startling visual image of Albertans' desire for a stronger Senate to represent the interests of the regions, the provinces, and the democratic principle. Bert Brown fought for the last 25 years of his life like no one for Senate democracy, and it was a great consolation to see him appointed and serve in the Senate of Canada. We remember fondly both the late Bert Brown and his tenacious, strong wife, the late Alice Brown.

Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister Harper also recommended to Her Majesty the Queen the summoning of Betty Unger to the Senate, and she served for several years with distinction. Then in April 2012, April 23 to be precise, Alberta held its fourth Senate election, this time with Doug Black winning with 428,000 votes, Scott Tannas coming second with 352,000, and Mike Shaikh with 310,000 votes. When vacancies became available, the Prime Minister filled them with Doug Black, who just retired effective October 31, two days ago. We thank him for his service. I can say that he was a very diligent defender of Alberta's natural resources and our regional economy and this province broadly. Scott Tannas continues to serve in the Senate with great distinction, and we truly appreciate his unapologetic defence of Alberta. Mike Shaikh came third, as I said, with 310,000 votes.

That is what brings us to today. Why do I go through that? Because I think a lot of Albertans may not know this history. Apparently, our friends in the Official Opposition are not aware of it. This election, held on October 18 of this year, was therefore the fifth Senate election, and we have selected democratically nine nominees for the Prime Minister to appoint to the upper Chamber, of whom five have been appointed. So we have created an important new democratic tradition.

Mr. Speaker, typically democracies develop and evolve through gradual reform, reforms of this nature. In the United States the

Senate originally was appointed by the state Legislatures, elected by the state Legislatures, but then some states decided – I think the state of Oregon was the first one, in the 1930s – to have their own popular direct Senate elections. Then other states followed suit, and eventually it became a democratic expectation that if you were to serve in the United States Senate, that powerful body, you should have a popular mandate. Now all 50 United States, of course, conduct those elections.

That was the vision of Premier Getty and his government, to begin the process – and this is such a classic Alberta story, isn't it? Not sitting around waiting for other people's approval, not endlessly negotiating and horse-trading at constitutional conferences but Alberta just saying: "We're going to get 'er done. We are going to create facts. We are going to take the lead. We are going to hold Senate elections, and then we will challenge the Prime Minister to recognize democracy." Albertans have succeeded haltingly and fittingly in that goal.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, the United Conservative Party in the 2019 election committed in its platform, as a core part of our democratic reform agenda, to renew the Senatorial Selection Act, which the NDP had allowed to lapse. The act ceased, effectively, to operate under the NDP because of their hostility to democratic principles. So we committed to reintroduce that law. We passed it. We changed the name. It's now known as the Alberta Senate Election Act.

Pursuant to that, we held the election, that we committed to in the last campaign, concurrent with this year's municipal election, on October 18, and I'm pleased to say that we had a record number of candidates. The largest ever number of candidates put their names on the ballot, which tells me that there is growing interest in this process of Senate democracy in Alberta. Eleven candidates put their names on the ballot, and, as we know, the top three vote-getters were Pam Davidson at 382,000 votes, Erika Barootes at 358,000 votes, and Mykhailo Martyniuk at 237,000 votes.

But I would like to thank and commend all of the candidates, the other eight candidates, who did not finish in the top three but who made a real sacrifice to travel the province, to raise funds, to campaign for weeks or months, to put their name on the ballot because they believe in this province and they believe in the democratic principle. Mr. Speaker, these were not all conservatives. I mean, there were people from the left. There was at least one candidate I know of from the far left. We see a growing interest in the Senate election process across the political spectrum, which I think is healthy in a democracy.

Mr. Speaker, that brings us to today, where we are seeking the ratification effectively of the Legislative Assembly to put forward these three individuals. Now, some might say: well, the Prime Minister has the sole discretion under the Constitution to nominate candidates for the Senate to Her Majesty the Queen. That is, strictly speaking, correct. Of course, this was further analyzed by the Supreme Court of Canada in the 2011 Senate reference case. Essentially, to summarize, what the Supreme Court said in that case was that Parliament could not modify the structure of the Senate with respect to appointments or the duration of terms, for example, by a simple parliamentary statute but that it would require a constitutional amendment. Fine. I accept that. But there is nothing in the Constitution that precludes the Prime Minister from using his discretion in nomination, power of nomination, to nominate somebody who has been democratically selected. That's the point. We have 23 years and five appointments to confirm that this is not some abstract legal theory. It is reality. It is obvious.

Now, the Prime Minister, this current Prime Minister Trudeau, has said that he has established a Senate appointment advisory committee to recommend to him qualified candidates. I met with

him on July 7, once again raised with him the desire of Albertans to choose their own Senators, and his response to me, Mr. Speaker, was essentially to say: well, once these candidates in Alberta have gone through that election process, you should encourage them to apply to the federal Senate appointment advisory committee because we have a process as well. Fair enough. Fair enough. I've passed on that advice to Ms Davidson, Ms Barootes, and Mr. Martyniuk, that to be given further consideration by the federal government, they should apply to that process. That's fine. I don't mind the Prime Minister following his own selection process as long as the democratically elected people from Alberta are ultimately selected and summoned by Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Speaker, on June 15 of this year this Assembly passed the following motion.

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

Now, regrettably, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister ignored that motion, ignored the democratic tradition and wishes of Albertans by making an appointment to one of the two vacancies that existed in the summer, appointing the outgoing mayor of Banff.

Remind me. Her name is . . .

3:30

Mr. Neudorf: Karen Sorensen.

Mr. Kenney: . . . former Mayor Sorensen, now Senator Sorensen. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I respect Mayor Sorensen. I wish her well. I wish her no ill will in my disagreement with the process of her appointment. I wish that she had put her name on the ballot, and if she had been elected, I would support her appointment in that democratic process one hundred per cent without reservation. That's the point. This is not personal; it's about democracy. The Prime Minister took that one Senate seat back from Albertans, kept it to himself for his own hand-chosen person.

Since then, fortuitously, as I mentioned, the Hon. Doug Black officially vacated his seat on October 31. He knew what he was doing. He knew perfectly well that that would be a week after the Senate election. As an elected Senator who won 428,000 votes, he wanted to facilitate this process. Kudos to you, Doug, for doing so. But, Mr. Speaker, that means that we now are back to two vacancies out of the six seats for Alberta in the upper Chamber, and we have three people who have been selected. This motion calls on the Prime Minister to fill those two vacancies from the three who are the largest vote-getters, who are the official nominees after we pass this motion.

Now, let me just broaden this to say that while we are here renewing our tradition of Senate democracy in Alberta – actually, before I get to that, I want to say one other thing. I've mentioned that I worked very closely with Senators Black and Tannas in the defence of Alberta's interests. It's also true that I've reached out and sought to work with other Senators, the former Senator the Hon. Grant Mitchell, who was the Leader of the Opposition in this place. I've worked with the Hon. Paula Simons and the other Alberta Senators. Mr. Speaker, we've had professional dealings, and I believe that they have, in their own way, sought to defend the best interests of Alberta.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have to believe that the fact that they were appointed by Prime Minister Trudeau and not elected by the people

of Alberta and that they are appointed for a life term to age 75 means that they do not have the same sense of democratic accountability to the people of Alberta as those elected Senators, and they certainly don't have the democratic legitimacy of those elected Senators. Whether other Senators will recognize it or not, when Doug Black got up in the Senate, all of the appointed Senators would look at him and know that he was speaking for 428,000 voters and the people of Alberta. That is a powerful thing.

This isn't just about, like, the abstract principle of democracy. This is about actually having Senators with a stronger voice, with a greater sense of accountability and therefore, I believe, a more robust defence of our province's interests in the federal Parliament, where those interests must so desperately be defended. Mr. Speaker, to bring this down to brass tacks, where we worked most closely with those Senators was in seeking to stop the disastrous federal no-more-pipelines law, formerly Bill C-69, the new Canada environmental assessment act, and to stop the prejudicial tanker ban in Alberta, Bill C-48. Both of those laws came to the Senate just after this government was elected.

They were in the Senate in the spring of 2019. In fact, I remember being sworn in with my colleagues in Executive Council and the very next day travelling to Ottawa with the hon. the Minister of Energy to appear on Thursday of that week. I think it may have been May 1, 2019. Actually, we were sworn in, come to think of it, on a morning, I think April 28, and that afternoon the Minister of Energy and I were appearing before the Senate committee studying Bill C-48, which had travelled here to Edmonton. Two days later the minister and I were appearing before the Senate banking committee in Ottawa – it's called the banking committee; it basically means the economic affairs committee – on Bill C-69. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you. I know that for many people the Senate is sort of maybe outside of their field of vision. It's an afterthought. Maybe they just think it's an anachronism. I guess the NDP's position is that it should be abolished, but we saw the relevance of the Senate, the genius of a regional upper Chamber in the fight on C-48 and C-69.

Now, let's understand. Both of those bills posed a direct and serious threat to the economic prosperity of Albertans: in the case of C-69 a massive federal power grab on our exclusive jurisdiction to regulate the development of our own resources, in the case of C-48 the first time in history that the federal government had banned through law the ability of a province to export one product, one product alone, bitumen, which is produced almost exclusively in one province, Alberta, a direct, outrageous attack on our economic interests. This was the case that I made with the Minister of Energy to those Senators from across Canada.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I saw heads nodding from Quebec Senators and east coast Senators who understood what I was saying, that there was a growing sense of alienation in this province, that the federal government was hamstringing our economic future, was interfering in our constitutional jurisdiction, and that if this could happen to Alberta, it could happen elsewhere. You know, when I said to the Senators in Ottawa, "Imagine at a time of a national unity crisis and a rise in support for separation in Quebec the federal government stepping in to pass a law to effectively ban the export of hydroelectricity or imagine the government coming in with a bill to ban the development of the aerospace aviation industry" – I said that it would be unthinkable – I saw Senators around the table, on both sides of the table, government and opposition, nodding their heads.

But you know who really led that fight? It was Senators Black and Tannas, again, because of their democratic legitimacy. They went to Senator after Senator after Senator. They explained Alberta's position. They and others put forward the amendments proposed by the government of Alberta and by groups like the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Canadian

pipeline association. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? They won in the Senate. Alberta won in the Senate. We managed to get a vote to strip out every provision of Bill C-48. The bill went back to the House of Commons basically a blank page, and there were substantive amendments made to remediate Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law. In fact, I think the Senate adopted every or almost every amendment proposed by the government of Alberta through those Senators.

Why am I talking about all this, Mr. Speaker? To say that this is the point. The point isn't just some abstract, theoretical political science discussion about representation by population. This is not some seminar in democratic reform. This is push comes to shove. We need an upper Chamber that represents these provinces and regions in a federation or it's not truly a federation.

Now, by the way, can I add that if the government of Alberta was being small minded about this, we wouldn't be proposing these Senate elections and their appointments. You know, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the governors of the United States don't like that there are two other people with a state-wide mandate that represent their states in Washington because it means that they don't speak solely for the state in national affairs. I think this may be one of the reasons why other provinces have not come onboard with the tradition of Senate elections, that Premiers don't want elected Senators claiming to speak for the province. They want to speak for the province single-mindedly, single-handedly. But we in this province see the value of the federation, and this is where we are big Canadians. Often this province, this government, the United Conservative Party are attacked by our adversaries for supposedly being small-minded, backward-looking provincialists that are grinding axes against Canada. Why don't we just shut up and suck it up? That's the message we hear from many of the Laurentian elites. It's certainly the attitude of Alberta's NDP.

3:40

But, Mr. Speaker, here's the reality. We are the champions of the Canadian federation as conceived at Confederation. We are the champions of the economic unity. Witness the labour mobility bill before this Chamber or the elimination of virtually all of our exemptions under the Canada free trade agreement. Witness our invitation to other provinces to join us in the New West Partnership agreement to realize the dream of the economic union.

Mr. Speaker, for the federation to function, the provinces must have a strong and meaningful voice when it comes to the defence of their interests in federal law and policy. It's not just about representation by population, and it's not just about the narrow defence of our interests more effectively through people with democratic mandates in Ottawa. This is also about what kind of federation we live in.

Do we live in a federation where Senators should be supplicants to the Prime Minister who appointed them? In this instance a Prime Minister who, I must submit, has repeatedly demonstrated through policy his hostility to this province and its economic interests, just yesterday at the stage in front of global elites in Glasgow, Mr. Speaker, threatening to put a cap on the development of the resources that belong exclusively to the people of Alberta, a Prime Minister who has threatened and through his policies has dealt massive damage and posed massive damage to the country's largest industry. The oil and gas sector alone: 535,000 jobs tied directly and indirectly to that industry.

Can we honestly expect people appointed by that Prime Minister vigorously to oppose his policies that are prejudicial to this province? No, we can't, Mr. Speaker. That is again why – the Fathers of Confederation understood this. They were short sighted in creating an appointed body, but they understood the importance

of regional representation in an upper Chamber as a balance and a check on executive authority.

For all of these reasons and so many others – but at the end of the day there were over 2 million votes cast, Mr. Speaker, for these candidates, and so for two million reasons we call upon the Prime Minister to respect the principle of democracy. We call on the Prime Minister to respect the tradition of appointing Alberta-elected Senators. We call on the Prime Minister to strengthen rather than damage national unity by appointing these individuals who two weeks ago were chosen by the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure. I almost feel as if this is a bit of a historic moment in the history of this Legislature. I rise to speak in favour of Government Motion 103.

Mr. Speaker, on my wall in my office in the Federal Building there's a poster of the late Mr. Stan Waters as he was running for the elected Senate. I had the opportunity to campaign with him in the Yellowhead constituency when he was running, and I had the opportunity to learn just a little bit of the character of the man that the people of Alberta chose to be their first Senator-in-waiting, and it was a good choice.

Mr. Speaker, we live in a confederation, in a federal union where we have a bicameral legislature made up of a House of Commons and an upper House called the Senate. That Senate is there supposedly for some very specific reasons, and they're important reasons. Our Fathers of Confederation understood that we are a very large country with many different cultures and groups of people, with many different points of view, that there's much to divide us but there's also much to bring us together.

The Senate was a House that was designed to try and bring us together as a country and as a nation and as a people. It had a job of providing a second body of sober thought to an elected House of Commons. It was designed to protect the less populous provinces from a tyranny of the majority, where the largest provinces by population of Quebec and Ontario could pass legislation, perhaps not considering the needs of the smaller, less populated provinces. It's appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister, and technically the Queen, our monarch. Literally from day one the Senate has been an issue of debate in this country. It has been one of the undercurrents that has sort of flowed across this country as we've debated the Confederation and the federal system in which we live.

It's easy sometimes to point out the problems that are part of this bicameral legislature, of this Senate. It's not elected, and therefore people question the responsibility of the members of that Chamber to the electorate or to the people of the province that they serve. It suffers from what many people would consider a lack of legitimacy because the members are not elected. And should a nonelected House be questioning the judgments of the elected House of Commons? It's not equal in that Ontario and Quebec still have an inordinate balance of the Senators within the Senate. The central Canadian elite continue to have more influence than what many Canadians believe they should in the Senate.

Many of the less populous provinces are concerned that they are still unable to protect their interests from a central Canada that dominates the House of Commons and that often has problems looking past what is good for Ontario and Quebec. Many Canadians have looked south to our neighbour, and they see that they have a

Senate as well, but it is an equal Senate in that each of the states elect the same number of Senators regardless of the population of that state, and that each of those Senators is elected by the will of the people of that state that they represent. Because each of those states elect a Senator and have an equal number of Senators, the Senate becomes an effective body in the United States for representing those less populous provinces, for being a second body of sober thought, for being a check and balance within the democratic system.

There is no doubt in the mind of this Albertan that the Canadian Senate needs to be reformed. It has a long history of being used as a place of political patronage to reward faithful politicians who will do the bidding of the central Canadian elites.

3:50

It often does lack political legitimacy because it's not elected, so sometimes it appears as if it rarely fulfills its responsibility of protecting the less populous provinces or acting as a second body of sober thought or of checking – and I don't mean this in a typical manner; I actually mean this in a political manner – where there's a tyranny of the majority, where the majority sometimes passes legislation that doesn't respect the rights of the less populated provinces or of the other provinces of this county. It rarely blocks legislation coming from the House of Commons because it is unelected, and it simply rubber-stamps bills that probably should be rejected. I believe our Premier has spoken to a few of them in the last couple of years that needed to be rejected by that House.

Yet the Senate could be so much more. The Senate could be, and it must become, a system within our system of checks and balances in our parliamentary system of democracy that helps to create a consensus of Canadians. Rather than fostering the polarizing geographical and cultural divisions that divide this nation, it could be an institution that brings us together. The Senate needs to become what it was first envisioned to be, a second body of sober thought that defends the less populated provinces from the massive majorities of eastern Canada, Ontario and Quebec, and that can use its second body of sober thought, its wise thinking, to build a country that represents all Canadians. That is why, Mr. Speaker, this latest round of senatorial elections in Alberta is so important. It's a step forward, once again, towards creating that Senate that Bert Brown first envisioned, that is elected, that is equal and is therefore effective.

Mr. Speaker, I think that I speak honestly and truthfully when I say that our nation is a sorely divided nation today and that the cracks and the divisions in this, the second-largest geographical nation in the world, are widening at an alarming rate. Many across Alberta and many in my constituency see these ever-widening cracks, this gulf between Alberta and the central Canadian elites, and they look at it with alarm. We see it when we talk about the equalization payments that will apparently always favour Quebec and seem to be a constant drain on the citizens of Alberta. We see this when the eastern elites cater to the extreme, radical environmentalists that are not interested in an environmentally responsible energy industry in Alberta or in this country. Rather, they appoint to positions of cabinet within the federal government environmentalists, energy activists determined to shut down the production of our largest industry in Canada.

We see a Prime Minister who seems to be, apparently, at ease with dictating carbon emissions over our natural resources that belong to the people of Alberta, that are owned by the people of Alberta, that will be produced and used for the benefit of the people of Alberta. Yet he seems at ease with dictating carbon emissions that are designed to shut down that industry. Jobs and wealth can be destroyed by a careless comment and by the stroke of a pen, and we've seen that when a federal government is comfortable with land-locking the energy and the resources of Alberta and the

livelihoods that are attached to those resources. Albertans are justly concerned when this Prime Minister and others before him seem to be capable of using anti-oil rhetoric, anti-Alberta sentiment in their political campaigning and federal elections to sway enough votes to win power in the last several elections, often at the expense of this province. It's one thing for the Prime Minister and his eastern elites to not understand Albertans; it's another thing completely for the Prime Minister to ignore the elected will of Albertans when they choose a Senator-in-waiting.

When the Prime Minister refuses to appoint, through the Governor General and our monarch, our Senators-in-waiting, he not only denies the political will of Albertans; he stokes the fires of discontent with the political infrastructure of this country. He places another brick in the wall between east and west. He legitimizes the feelings of alienation that threaten the unity of this great nation.

Yet there are men and women of vision in this country. We've had them in the past, and we have them presently, today. Bert Brown, Preston Manning, Stan Waters, Brian Mulroney, Stephen Harper, Cliff Breitzkreuz, Betty Unger, Doug Black, Scott Tannas: all of these people shared a vision in creating a Senate that would better be capable of meeting the needs of all Canadians.

As of the last few weeks this list of visionary Albertans has grown by three. On October 18, 1.1 million Albertans chose Pam Davidson, Erika Barootes, and Mykhailo Martyniuk, and should the Prime Minister respect the will of Albertans, he will not only make the Canadian parliamentary system work more effectively, but he will start to heal the rifts within this nation.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of attending a conference a few years ago where I witnessed the benefit of an elected Senator. I was attending a conference down in the United States, and one of Alberta's elected Senators was there actively defending Alberta's interests. The Senator addressed energy activists concerned with the oil industry in Alberta, and he did so with compelling truth about the most environmentally responsible energy industry in the world, that was founded in Alberta. That is the kind of Senator that we need. That is the kind of Senators-in-waiting that we have elected, and I want to congratulate our new Senators-in-waiting on their victories. And I would, along with the Premier, congratulate all who ran for their vision, for their courage, and for their dedication to this province and to this nation.

This nation has so much promise. If we could only remember that government is to work for the people and is there to draw us together and it's there to help us solve our problems. Alberta, I believe, took a step in that direction on October 18. Now it is in the Prime Minister's court. Will he be a nation maker, will he be a statesman for all Canadians and for all Albertans? Or will he choose to be something else?

Congratulations to our Senators-in-waiting.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, just to add in, thank you for the comments from the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon and from the hon. Premier. I, too, want to congratulate our Senators-in-waiting and all 11 candidates who stepped forward to put their names to Albertans and to ask for, really, a mandate to be able to go to Ottawa and represent this province. I really hope that the Prime Minister takes that seriously and gives our Senators-in-waiting the voice in Ottawa that they deserve and gives Albertans that voice through them.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:00

Government Bills and Orders**Second Reading****Bill 77****Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021**

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 77, the Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021.

This bill makes two significant changes that will help municipalities provide their residents with programs and services during a difficult economic time. Municipalities have told us that they have a problem collecting taxes from some oil and gas companies. To be perfectly clear, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of companies pay their taxes, but some have not. According to the rural municipalities association survey done a few months ago, at that point municipalities were owed an estimated \$245 million in back taxes. That's money those communities need in the midst of a particularly challenging economic situation, and it's money that can be used to support municipal projects, to offer services to vulnerable residents, and to make their communities safe and prosperous places to live and work.

The Municipal Government Act allows communities to recoup unpaid taxes through the sale of seized property, but a recent court decision in 2019 struck down the ability for municipalities to leverage a lien against linear property. Since that court decision municipalities have struggled to collect unpaid oil and gas taxes from some companies.

We have been criticized on this by the opposition for not doing this sooner, but as anyone who is paying attention will tell you, it wouldn't make sense to adopt these amendments when oil was trading in the negatives just a short period of time ago. Not a great time to collect money, when they're actually paying people to take away their oil. That would have put many companies out of business. Perhaps the opposition wants that. Who knows? But today, with Alberta's recovery well under way, Mr. Speaker, it's now more feasible to find a balanced approach that will help our municipalities while supporting the oil and gas sector.

These amendments will restore the special lien provisions for linear property and machinery and equipment. When a company doesn't pay their taxes, the municipality will have a priority over all other creditors except the Crown and regulatory environmental obligations, and they can use this special lien on both linear property as well as machinery and equipment.

This means that if a company becomes bankrupt or decides not to pay their taxes, municipalities will again have a tool to convince these companies to pay or else property may be seized to cover debts. As a result, companies will have more of an incentive to negotiate payment plans with municipalities for their unpaid taxes, and if they do not, municipalities will have a hammer. They will have a way to avoid extreme losses. This will help to ensure that the tax burden will not be shifted unnecessarily to other ratepayers like single seniors living on a fixed income – that's not fair to have them pay the taxes for a company – like those who pay their taxes on time. It will allow the municipalities to continue to provide necessary services.

This process isn't going to happen overnight, so in the short term we are also extending the PERC, the provincial education requisition credit, program. PERC helps communities that are unable to collect education property tax from oil and gas companies. The credit is equal to the uncollectible taxes on delinquent oil and gas properties.

The program was set to end at the end of this fiscal year. It will now go two more years, till the end of the '22-23 fiscal year, and it will enable councils to set their budgets without having to make extreme cuts or implement drastic tax hikes to compensate for unpaid education property taxes.

These two changes, Mr. Speaker, to be clear, are not a magic bullet, not a magic solution for all our economic challenges, but for municipalities across Alberta owed money that is unpaid from oil and gas companies, this will be an important tool to help them prosper in the years to come. Municipalities asked for our assistance, and we listened. We worked with municipalities and we worked with the oil and gas sector to ensure we found a balanced approach because, ultimately, we need to work together for a brighter future for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, it's not an either/or. It's not that we need oil and gas companies and not municipalities, and it's not that we need municipalities and not oil and gas companies. We need both. We need them to work together. We will as a government continue to work collaboratively with those municipalities and with the oil and gas industry to create jobs, improve the economy, and improve the lives of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to enter into debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House and add some comments to Bill 77, Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021, on behalf of my constituents. When I look through these documents, it reminds me of the scene that was not very long ago, about two years, the last two and half years, when this ruling party, UCP party, and its leader, the hon. Premier, gave hope to the municipalities. The municipalities, as the UCP said in their manifesto, were struggling with a number of issues. They gave municipalities hope that they will invest and that they will provide more funding in many ways. One way that could include is to help them put more policing, recruit more law enforcement people in those municipalities, and as well they gave them hope that this government will create jobs.

I remember discussing the legislation not long ago in this House that brought forward changes. They were widely criticized not only by the opposition but also by the municipal leaders. Instead of providing help to those municipalities in that bill, the government proposed bold changes that negatively and adversely affected the revenue.

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

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

**Point of Order
Relevance**

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(b), speaks to matters other than the question under discussion, I'm okay if the hon. members across want to criticize the legislation before us, if they want to criticize me, if they want to criticize our government, but the member clearly turned his back on this piece of legislation and is going down a path on another one. Okay. I would just respectfully ask that you remind the member which bill is actually before this House, and if he wants to criticize that one, I encourage him to do so.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, it's not a point of order. The member is the first speaker who rose to this Bill 77 to participate in the debate, and I would, I guess, urge the Minister of Municipal Affairs to have some patience and let the member participate in the debate. It's not even two minutes into it, and if he had any questions, concerns, he can respond to them later on in the debate, so it's not a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Having heard both sides, I hesitate to call this a point of order, but I would ask the hon. member to ensure that his debate does stick to the bill at hand and raise that up so that we can have some productive and lively debate on this bill.

Back to the Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Debate Continued

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate your decision.

Mr. Speaker, according to the latest RMA survey of its 69 members there are \$245 million in unpaid property taxes. This survey was done in 2021, and RMA President Paul McLaughlin has told our caucus that the problem has continued to get worse since this survey. For the past nine months it has worsened since the survey came in. This was the exact information shared by the municipal leaders and shared by the opposition House members.

4:10

I'm sure the hon. minister will remember when they brought a bill to propose a reduction in MSI. Then they brought a bill that added more user fees on cell users in municipalities instead of helping those municipalities. Since then the municipalities have been angry. They have shared their concerns many times. That is the only pressure that forced this government to bring this second piece of legislation addressing the Municipal Government Act to appease some of that anger that is among those municipal leaders as well as Albertans.

Looking at this bill, I'm sorry to say that it seems like the government has not learned the lessons from the past. It seems like another eye-washing attempt to just, you know, probably save their reputation, mitigate the criticism. The government has spoken to the municipal leaders, and municipal leaders are approaching the government. Not only that; they also proposed or demanded some of the changes that would probably help those municipalities to recoup some of the past few tax amounts that could probably add to the municipal lives that have been badly, badly affected due to lack of funding to the municipalities, not only lack of funding but increased property taxes, increased user fees. What this bill is proposing is not exactly what these municipal leaders have been asking even government to do.

This government took two years to not even act on their own promise. That is one of the key promises of their election platform. Even two and a half years after coming into government, they're still struggling to understand or take actions that can help our communities, that can help our communities build infrastructure, maintain infrastructure, maintain local services so the municipalities can create jobs and municipalities can contribute to our economy by building the local economy.

What the municipal leaders are calling for the government to enact or legislate is that they're asking the Alberta Energy Regulator to not issue, prohibit those licences or add the mechanisms in the legislation

so municipal governments could understand and identify who they are dealing with, so which actors are bad actors. They have a bad reputation. They have a bad past history. They're not paying taxes to other municipalities. All those demands and the numbers I don't see the ministry of municipalities contradicting anywhere in the media or in this House. Once the information is clear, once the demand of the municipal leaders is clear, it's hard to understand what is prohibiting this government from making those changes that can actually help the municipalities to be able to recover if there is any possibility. First of all, a number of those companies that were working no longer exist. The business has been closed or moved. If there is just this bill, it still doesn't provide the strong mechanism that could help municipalities to recover the cost.

A few things that this bill does is that it allows the municipalities to levy liens on those bad actors if they don't pay taxes. You know, I deal with a number of those people in the business community and my community – people in construction, people in cooking, people in a number of those issues – and levying liens doesn't go very far. Many times the cost and the efforts to do that are not even worth doing it. In this such case, instead of providing any help to those communities, this bill will make the law that will probably add more costs instead of recovering the past due taxes from the bad actors. It will add more cost to them. They will refrain from even using this reasoning in the law that the government is proposing.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

It was very clear from the municipal leaders. They have said that this small, little change has in the past – it didn't help the last legislation that was passed by this government, so this is not going to do anything. As I said, this is a tiny, eye-washing attempt that will not go very far and that will not serve Albertans, that will not serve local municipalities to recover the amount, about, like, \$250 million, \$245 million, that was reported in February this year in a survey of the 69 municipalities. This is not a small amount. The government should have actually done – if they didn't have any better way to go, at least there was some clear message from the community leaders. The community leaders were responsible, were suffering, and that was a collective demand from a number of those communities.

This bill is lacking the very action that was demanded by those municipal leaders telling government that levying liens itself would probably be more costly in many ways than recovering the amount of past due taxes from those companies.

4:20

At this very preliminary stage, as this is my first comment on this Bill 77, Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021, we see, as it is, that we cannot support this bill. We'll look, actually dig deep into this and will try to bring forward more comprehensive proposals and expect the government will look at it, and probably, if they're willing to accept some of those amendments, we might be able to support this bill.

At this point this bill doesn't do enough. This bill is not going to help rebuild municipalities. This bill is not going to help collect those funds, and at this stage the government has failed to listen to the municipal leaders. The municipalities have already been struggling due to the reduction to their MSIs, due to the unprecedented user fee that was put forward to cellphone users in municipalities, and the rising property taxes, education property taxes, a number of those issues. So at this stage we do not support this bill, and I'll be looking forward to working with my colleagues. Potentially, we will probably bring forward some amendments in line with those demands that have been asked for by municipal leaders.

With that, I will close my remarks, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we are on second reading of Bill 77, Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to take the opportunity to express my support for this remarkable government bill, Bill 77, the Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021. Let me first provide my appreciation to the minister for sponsoring this bill, which will allow municipalities to collect unpaid property taxes for some oil and gas companies. This bill is part of the provincial government's commitment to support municipalities by ensuring a balance between tax and accountability and municipal sustainability. These changes build on a provincial program that gives municipalities a credit on education property taxes unpaid by oil and gas companies.

The provincial government will continue to support municipalities by extending the provincial education requisition credit, or PERC, program up to the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The PERC program was introduced to help municipalities deal with uncollectable taxes on oil and gas properties in 2015. It helps municipalities avoid significant losses in the short term and allows them to defer payment of uncollectable education property taxes to the province.

Canada has the third-most oil reserves in the world, and a huge majority of it can be found in Alberta. Our country, as well, is among the top producing countries of oil while Alberta is Canada's largest oil and natural gas producer. With that, we have numerous oil and gas companies in Alberta, which are engaged in the responsible, ethical production and development that helps boost Canada's economy, as this industry is our country's largest export.

The provincial government continues to have the most competitive tax system in the country and continues to support jobs in the oil and gas industry. With the job-creating tax cut, Alberta is now the most competitive business jurisdiction and among the most attractive investment destinations in North America. In addition, the government also introduced the film and television tax credit, which has been a massive success in attracting major film industry projects to this beautiful province. The Red Tape Reduction Act was also enacted to help speed up regulatory approvals, attract investment, remove administrative burdens, and modernize many existing pieces of legislation.

Just recently announced, Alberta is moving forward with climate policies that are creating jobs and actually reducing emissions. Alberta's government is using up to \$176 million from the technology innovation and emissions reduction system and the low-carbon economy leadership fund for 16 projects that will cut almost 7 million tonnes of emissions by 2030. The funding originates from the carbon levies paid by the large emitters in Alberta's technology innovation and emissions reduction framework. This will cut emissions while diversifying the economy.

The provincial government also provided a 35 per cent reduction in property taxes for shallow gas wells and associated pipelines. This change will continue for three years. Municipalities will be required to adjust to the revised assessment with no tax credit or funding support. Alberta's government also eliminated the oil drilling equipment tax and provided a tax holiday for all new wells and associated pipelines until 2024.

The overwhelming majority of Alberta's oil and gas companies are responsible job creators who pay their taxes when they're due.

There are a few companies who aren't able to for some reason, and special liens were made against their assets and properties, as has been done to other businesses or individuals. In 2019 the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled that the current liens do not legally apply to linear property such as wells and pipelines. As a result of the court decision, there is no effective legal mechanism for municipalities to collect unpaid taxes on oil and gas properties such as wells. Bill 77 will restore and clarify a special lien for unpaid property taxes on linear property and machinery and equipment. This lien will give municipalities priority over creditors to receive taxes owed with the exception only to the Crown and environmental regulatory obligations.

Mr. Speaker, numerous statements have been made that having an oil and gas business is promising in Alberta. However, like every other business, oil and gas companies will meet different challenges and difficulties along their way. Some may be due to management while others will come from the external burdens imposed for doing such business, like the federal Bill C-69, which created more red tape that hinders efforts made to bring ethical and responsibly developed Albertan oil to the global market.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, and with other various reasons, a small number of oil and gas companies operating in Alberta have not paid property taxes due to the municipalities in which they operate. The Rural Municipalities of Alberta have estimated that the amount owed by some oil and gas companies is approximately \$245 million in unpaid taxes to approximately 69 municipalities, mostly in rural Alberta. It is also estimated that between 40 to 60 per cent of the unpaid taxes are the responsibilities of companies that continue to operate in Alberta while the remainder are facing insolvency.

4:30

We all know the importance of taxes to the government, whether it may be federal, provincial, or municipal. It is the lifeblood of the government as it is indispensable to the existence of any government, and it is the backbone of local government. Through taxes individuals and businesses contribute to funding public essential needs and services, including roads, infrastructure, education, social services, and health care services.

Bill 77, Mr. Speaker, is an important step towards ensuring that Alberta municipalities are able to continue to fund and maintain the programs and services their residents need. The special lien being introduced by this bill can be made by Alberta municipalities against the unpaid taxes of the oil and gas companies, whether still in operation or undergoing insolvency, and it also gives these municipalities priority over other creditors, with the exceptions I previously mentioned. Also, this special lien assigns liability to the owner of the linear property and operator of oil and gas machinery and equipment for the unpaid property taxes. This is being done as the owner and operator may be different depending on corporate structure, leaving no gaps to this legislation. Third, the special lien applies to all the debtors' assessable property located within the municipalities, including any assessable improvements to the property.

Companies that pay their taxes are not impacted by this change while companies that are not able to pay their taxes should contact their local municipal authorities to discuss this special lien and what it means for their business relationship, actually. I have previously touched on the importance of taxes, Mr. Speaker, and this bill ensures the collection by Alberta municipalities of unpaid property taxes from some oil and gas companies. Nonetheless, resorting to stiff actions must not be hastily done. In the past they did not kick the horse that gets them to the destination they want when it was down and tired.

Another amendment to the Municipal Government Act being introduced by Bill 77 is to establish a 120-day redemption period between the time the taxes are due and the enforcement of the special lien processes, which will ensure that financially burdened and vulnerable companies have sufficient time to enable the negotiation of payment arrangements. The changes that Bill 77 brings, Mr. Speaker, apply to unpaid taxes owing to the passing of this bill when proclaimed and thereafter. This bill will balance the need for corporations to pay their fair share while maintaining sustainability to the municipalities.

I again express my appreciation to the minister for making this possible, a needed tool for municipalities as they recover unpaid taxes and to provide incentives to those companies that were not able to pay their taxes to start paying them again.

I encourage all the members of this Chamber to cast their support for Bill 77. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 77. I think that unpaid municipal taxes are certainly an important issue. I thank the minister for turning his attention to this very important issue, but like many other actions of this government, it's also a matter of too little, too late. We know that throughout this pandemic municipalities across this province, in particular rural municipalities, have been severely impacted by the pandemic. Their tax base has shrunk because of people losing jobs, because of businesses losing revenues, because of businesses even shutting down in part due to the inaction of this government and its policies. Under those circumstances, certainly, this issue of unpaid municipal taxes is one of critical importance for many municipalities. Their survival depends on this issue.

When I say that this government and this minister acted too late, the reason for that is that this issue was growing over the last few years, and the government did not act until it reached a crisis situation. The decision in Northern Sunrise County versus Virginia Hills Oil Corp, 2019 is a decision from the Alberta Court of Appeal. The court held that linear property tax areas are not subject to a special lien. It essentially left municipalities without recourse, without any mechanism to collect those unpaid taxes. That decision, Mr. Speaker, was handed down on February 12, 2019, by the Alberta Court of Appeal. Three months later this government was in charge. They did nothing in 2019 about it. They did nothing in 2020 about it. Here we are in November, almost the end of 2021, and the government puts forward a bill that is inadequate in many respects.

I will certainly explain how it's inadequate. First of all, because of this delay – it's almost three years, two and a half years – it may now be impossible for many of these municipalities to use this bill and collect some of those taxes owed to them because some of those companies may not be even around. The pandemic has hit all businesses. This delay in bringing forward this bill certainly hinders a municipality's ability to collect on those unpaid taxes. Now that they've decided to move ahead on this issue, I do not believe that this is the strongest bill or the strongest tool that will help those municipalities to collect on the taxes owed.

4:40

Last Thursday, I believe, when the minister presented this bill, after session I was driving down the QE II towards Calgary, and like many people of my age group, I was also listening to CBC. They were interviewing certain representatives from different

municipalities and asking about their take on this bill, and what was clear from all of those comments was that government did not adequately consult with the municipalities on what the solutions should be. One of the main criticisms of the government bill coming from a municipality's representative was that the government should have used AER processes and ensured that if a company owes municipal taxes, they're not granted new licences. That will extend a municipality's ability to collect those unpaid taxes more effectively.

Though the scheme the government put forward gives a special priority lien for tax debt on linear property or machinery and equipment, it also says in section 5(2)(b) that "taxes due to a municipality on linear property or on machinery and equipment . . . are a special lien on all the debtor's assessable property located within the municipality, including any assessable improvements to that property." For the companies who owe tax to a municipality, this lien will only apply to their assets within that municipality. So it's quite possible that a company may not be doing very well in municipality A and owes a lot in taxes to municipality A and may be doing very well in municipalities B and C, but municipality A will not be able to go after a company's assets in other municipalities. They may not have enough assets, but during the delay from this government they may have moved those assets somewhere. Those municipalities will not be able to collect on this, on their owed taxes.

Not only did government delay to respond to this critical issue; now that they have decided to address it, they are leaving huge loopholes in it. Those actors will still be able to get away with those unpaid taxes. They are still refusing to work with and include solutions that municipal leaders are presenting to them such as using AER licence mechanisms to stop companies from getting those licences if they have not paid taxes.

As was mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, the overwhelming majority of Albertans pay their taxes regularly. The overwhelming majority of businesses pay their taxes regularly. It's an expectation in this country and in our province, where we are governed by the rule of law that everybody plays by the same rules. If government really wanted to give municipalities the tool, they could have worked with the municipalities and their leaders and come up with better tools so that municipalities can collect on these unpaid taxes.

I think I do have some questions as well if the minister would want to address those questions. I understand that this legislation is a response to that decision from the Court of Appeal in Northern Sunrise County v. Virginia Hills, February 12, 2019, but I do want to ask the government and minister if they would inform the House who they have consulted on it. There was a municipal election and change of leadership in both bigger cities across this province. Was there any conversation? I highly doubt it. Was there any conversation with the newly elected municipal leaders? What about what municipal leaders . . . [interjection]

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I think that the member brings up a really interesting point considering that this piece of legislation comes at a time immediately following a provincial municipal election. I know that we have heard from some leaders regarding this piece of legislation, specifically the RMA and their concerns. When you ask about consultation, perhaps talking about what should have occurred and where we are now, being able to elaborate on a change of municipality leadership and what that would look like and how potentially that could impact this piece of legislation I think is a really valued point, and I think that it's one that this government didn't consider. I'm curious about what your thoughts are about that and what that tells Albertans about the leadership of

this government moving forward with legislation that directly impacts municipalities.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall with about two minutes remaining unless there is another intervention.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we had municipal elections just last month, October 18, and I don't think there was enough time for this government to consult with those municipal leaders and bring forward this legislation. But what we know is that even the municipal leadership before has been asking this government to take action on this issue, and government sat on their hands for the last two and a half years. Now the solution they are proposing, I don't think . . . [interjection]

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very interested in the member's comments, but I wanted to sort of, I guess, add another element to this discussion. You know, this bill in and of itself is not necessarily problematic. What is problematic about it is that it is once again a demonstration of this government acting last and acting least, as they do on almost every file, to the great detriment of Albertans.

4:50

Again, you know, as my hon. colleague was saying, municipalities have been asking for this, and government has been doing nothing. There are certainly other steps that government could have taken to aid municipalities. Yeah. I was just wondering if the hon. member could comment on that, you know, on the fact that this is sort of just a repetition of what we generally see from this government, waiting too long and doing too little.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall with now about three minutes remaining.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you to my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. I think what we are seeing here is apparent from this government, that they do it late and they do, like, the bare minimum. In this case I would certainly be interested to hear from the minister: if municipal leaders are calling for the AER . . . [interjection] No, I will not give way.

Mr. McIver: Oh. You asked to hear from the minister.

The Acting Speaker: It is the member who has the floor who has the opportunity to either take or not take the intervention.

Mr. McIver: I just took him at his word. I thought he wanted to hear from me.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member can continue with about two minutes and 20 seconds. [interjection]

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). The minister said that I rejected the minister's intervention, which I have every right to do. That's in the standing orders. He said that I was not sincere. He is imputing false allegations. I think he's been here long enough to know how to behave in this House. It's clearly offside the standing orders and every tradition of this House.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think anybody that was actually listening to the conversation would know that I was not imputing false intent of the speaker. He said several times in his speech: I wish I could hear from the minister; I wish I could hear from the minister; I wish I could hear from the minister. I stood up. [interjection] You see, he won't listen because he knows that he's wrong. I stood up so he could listen to the minister, and he refused to hear from the minister. I would say that those motives were pretty sincere on this side, not so much on that member's side.

The Acting Speaker: I am prepared to rule. Unfortunately, similar to what happened during question period, I did not have the opportunity to hear the comments that were made; therefore, I cannot rule on it. It sounds like the conversation that is happening between both sides under what has been called a point of order or at least called as potentially one is a matter of debate. Therefore, I am not going to see this as a point of order.

I would ask that the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall please continue with about two minutes remaining.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was responding to my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, and the question was about consultation, the solution this government came up with after a delay of two and a half years. At an appropriate time I think we do want to hear from the minister what he thinks about the municipal leaders who are calling on this minister that the minister should use AER procedures to prohibit those bad actors who owe property taxes.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member. I just wanted to bring to his attention that there was another member who was looking for either the opportunity to intervene or the opportunity not to depending on what your decision on that would be. If you could please – and then continue or allow.

Mr. Sabir: I will continue.

The Acting Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Sabir: That's the solution there that municipalities are proposing.

The questions that the minister can answer at his next opportunity will be: who did he consult? The second thing: why is there such a loophole in section 5(2) that municipalities are only restricted to go after the debtor's property within their municipality? Why not their other properties so they can collect? The third thing will be what consultations the government had with the new municipal leadership, if any. The last one will be: if all municipal leaders, their representative organizations are asking the government to use AER processes, why are they hesitant to use that process so the municipalities can collect on those unpaid taxes?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 77, the Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021, this evening, and thank you

for the acknowledgement. There is a lively conversation happening this evening, and I appreciate that. I'm sure we will see that continue here. There is a lot, I suppose, within this legislation to be considered. Some good things, some first steps I would say. We've heard members already this evening commenting on the fact that this seems to continue on the government's path of acting too little, too late. This seems to be a continuation of that.

I look back at resolution 1-19F from the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, and that was put forward in November of 2019. We are now – well, if I'm correct – two years past that, Mr. Speaker, and here we are with Bill 77 before us. Of course, the RMA put this resolution forward because they had seen the process unfold with regard to the Virginia Hills decision and, I believe, potentially even the Redwater decision and having their ability to hold these companies accountable for linear taxation. Two years later we are finally seeing this government willing to take some action.

Now, it's not nearly going as far as what was proposed by the RMA and what continues to be proposed. They've been quite clear about that. Members on this side of the House and the critic for this important portfolio explained during news conferences and press releases that we are thankful that we're finally seeing some transparency regarding – sorry. Actually, we're happy to see finally that steps are being taken, but we are still concerned that more transparency needs to happen regarding which companies have not paid their taxes by granting that power to the Alberta Energy Regulator to publish these lists. This, again, reflects what the RMA asked for back in 2019, and I don't think we are seeing that through this process. Maybe the government and the minister have plans to make that a reality. That would be my hope. Maybe we can hear on that, if that is going to be the case in the near future. I know that many rural municipalities across the province are looking for that, and it is an important step to hold these corporations accountable.

It continues to be a concern with, as the Member for Edmonton-Meadows brought up, the important fact that, again, when we are talking about legislation, we cannot do this work in silos. We have to consider the changes that the UCP has made to municipal tax structures and to the MSI when we are considering what is being offered here. Again, we have Bill 77, the Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, which is arguably acting too little, too late. These municipalities have been saying that they are under water. The fact is that if more action isn't taken to recoup these funds that have been left for them to cover the costs of, they simply aren't going to be able to continue down this path. Instead of the government recognizing that, what we have in Bill 77 is half measures, I would say, not going far enough. Further, what we've seen through the cuts to MSI, I believe: a 25 per cent cut across the board to municipalities across the province. They continue to suffer, to be concerned about their future and about their future potential under this UCP government.

5:00

I am also interested – and I apologize, because looking within the legislation here, I know that some will be potentially left to regulation. But I know that the RMA did ask that the amendments that they had laid out in their proposal 1-19F from November 2019 – they asked that the proposals they put forward would be retroactive and that existing linear property tax arrears constitute a secured claim. They're concerned that while what we're seeing from this government now is saying that, moving forward, this might be the case, they wanted reassurances that that would be retroactive and that they would be able to hold past claims accountable and be able to recoup those funds as well. So I apologize. Maybe that's an easy answer that this minister is willing to give me. I would appreciate that clarification as well.

The idea of unpaid municipal taxes by industry . . . [interjection] I would be happy to take that interjection. Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member. He asked, I think, a legitimate question, and I'll give him what I think is a straightforward and legitimate answer. He mentioned that the municipalities wanted to know that the existing debts would be included in the act and in their ability to collect, and the answer is yes. That concern of the municipalities has been met by this legislation in its current form. Since the hon. member had me stand up, I won't use this time to do anything other than answer his question.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you for that clarification. I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the fact is that unpaid municipal taxes by industry have been an important topic, one that has been growing more and more over the past few years. While I'm thankful to see this bill in front of us, some first steps, I am also quite hopeful that we will see more from this government.

We've heard the number thrown around, \$200 million in unpaid taxes to municipalities across the province. Now, looking back at the document that was presented at the RMA at the time, in 2019, I believe, their number was between \$80 million and \$90 million. We can see that this continues to be an issue that is growing substantially, and if we don't take real action to tackle it, it is going to continue to be an issue.

Again, thankful to see that municipalities will have some ability to recoup these funds and that they are going to be part of the discussions when we are talking about how taxes are going to be paid back and how these debts are going to be paid back in that case. [interjection] Oh. Thank you.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, hon. member. I guess one of the questions I have – this has been historically an issue in the past, and I'm not sure if you have an answer for this or if this is something that the minister wants to jump back in on again – is that we know historically that trying to recuperate the taxes was, even with the past system in place, still a struggle for municipalities.

I guess, in looking at the legislation – I recognize that the member has also only had it as long as I have – do you see any significant changes in the legislation that will help improve that process? Right now, based on history, even with having the ability to have these pieces of legislation, municipalities still struggled in being able to get those taxes. Have you heard anything from any of the leaders around that?

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you for that interjection, and it is an important point to make. Earlier in my speech I did recognize the fact that municipal leaders have been again asking that a list be presented and published recognizing companies that haven't paid their taxes, that aren't being held accountable. That is an important piece to accountability, whether we're talking about a decision to make these loans or to allow new development permits to go forward in a municipality.

These are about being transparent, about ensuring that we're holding bad actors accountable. Further to the point I was just making, there needs to be a mechanism for the AER to prohibit licences to these bad actors. Again, these are two things that I don't think we necessarily see in this legislation, and hopefully we will see this government willing to follow through on those actions that are being requested by the RMA and other municipal leaders across the province.

Further to the point of the member that just had the interjection, I think that we should be considering how municipalities are going

to hold these companies accountable when they find these bad actors. Is there funding attached for these municipalities to have boots on the ground to ensure that they are able to hold these companies accountable? I would argue that this is a piece that goes back to concerns around MSI reductions.

Of course, these are dollars that are used for capital projects, but when we start talking about scaling funding back from one piece or another, whether we're talking about scaling funding back for policing in municipalities, whether we're talking about scaling back funding for projects like capital projects and infrastructure projects, the money has to come from somewhere. It seems that this government has gone down a path where they continue to scale funds back from municipalities, and they leave it up to the municipality to either cut their own budgets or further – the other decision that they might make, as you could imagine, Mr. Speaker, is to raise taxes on their residents. Now, again, this seems to be a path that this UCP government is on, where they scale back funding, and if the municipality is concerned about not being able to pay their bills at the end of the day, it's the members of their own community that are frustrated with those municipalities for having to consider things like raising property taxes.

This government is making decisions that are affecting our municipalities and leaving it up to those municipal leaders to take the blame, which I don't think is fair in many instances. I think we can all appreciate the considerable debt load that the province is under. We need to do as much as we can to reduce that burden, but I don't think it's necessarily the right decision or the fair decision to push those costs back onto municipalities, just like how I don't believe that we should be allowing bad actors and corporations to push the costs of their abandoned projects or their reclamation costs back onto municipalities because they weren't held accountable through the process.

Again, I'm happy to see some of the changes that we're seeing put forward in here. It was quite clear that the RMA and municipal leaders across the province were concerned about this when the court case proceeded, and they continue to be concerned. I think that, again, in some respects these are half measures. There is a lot more clarity needed, a lot more transparency needed when it comes to holding these bad actors accountable. We will continue to call on this government to move forward with things, again, like publishing that list of corporations that haven't been able to pay those taxes, ensuring that if they aren't paying their taxes in one county, they are being held accountable in another county. A concern that we have is that if a corporation is seeing major profits in one county but not so much in the other, they might be considering abandoning projects in the county where they aren't seeing any money or, at the very least, not paying their taxes. So that continues to be a concern and why there needs to be more accountability for municipalities.

With all that being said, Mr. Speaker, I am happy that we see some first steps, again, in Bill 77, the Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021. I appreciate the minister being willing to stand up and answer, I suppose, what was likely an easy question. But sometimes we can get that clarity as well, so I'm thankful for that.

5:10

We have had conversations with the president of the RMA, and he has continued to tell us that these issues that we've seen through past surveys that the RMA has put out around these unpaid property taxes continue to be an issue. So again I question whether this is going to be enough when we consider the fact that 40 to 60 per cent of the taxes that are unpaid are coming from companies that continue to operate in our province. We have these companies who aren't paying their taxes in certain jurisdictions or certain counties

or municipalities across the province, but they continue to be allowed to operate in other parts of the province. That's definitely a concern. They need to be held accountable, and while we are seeing that to some extent through this legislation, I don't think it's nearly going far enough.

I don't think it's truly reflective of what the RMA has requested as far as accountability for these and ensuring that linear property taxes are going to be paid in a way that is meaningful to ensure the long-term sustainability of municipalities across the province. [interjection] With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I'm going to take my seat for another interjection. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate it, hon. member. You know, one question that I have – and I put it out there; the minister is here as well – is that you often have, let's say, an oil and gas company or a service company that operates in more than one county or municipality. I've seen it in quite a number of towns and cities, where people will choose to have their warehouse or their headquarters just on the county line because the taxes are cheaper in that one county as opposed to the actual town, let's say, of Peace River or Grande Prairie. So I'm just curious to know: from what you've seen in this legislation so far, is there a way by which they can share that money around? Let's say that the main thing is in county A, and they're doing really well, and they're not paying their taxes or they owe taxes in county B, right? It's the same company, the same operation. Is there a way by which this could be distributed in a more equitable way?

Mr. Carson: Absolutely. Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. Just for clarity, how much time do I have left?

The Speaker: Three minutes remaining.

Mr. Carson: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think that that situation that the member raised will continue to be an issue. I don't think that the government has brought any clarity to that fact or any transparency to that fact. Again, I kind of made that point earlier, that we may see a corporation or a company that is operating in two counties. In the first they could see that their assets aren't offering very good returns, so they don't pay those taxes, but they continue to operate in other jurisdictions.

Again, this goes back to the fact that we need a true accounting of these companies and what jurisdictions they're potentially operating in and if they are paying their taxes on time and to the level that they should be or if they aren't. I think that, again, we need to ensure that the AER or whatever responsible party has the opportunity to either revoke those licences or prohibit the issuing of those licences ensures that not only is there a level of accountability but also that companies and corporations understand that they can't potentially pit one county against the other or can't continue to go down this path of not reclaiming or not paying their taxes and just simply closing shop and leaving those costs on municipalities, which is, of course, at the end of the day, taxpayers across the province and in those municipalities.

These continue to be our concerns, and there are many more questions. I'm sure that other members will have the opportunities to raise a few of them that, hopefully, we will have addressed. But it continues to concern me that, first of all, we've seen such a delay on this important topic. Municipalities have been saying for years that they might not have a future if we don't take immediate action on this, and now we are two years later, Mr. Speaker, and we only see the first steps taking place. Again I would ask the minister to answer, if they are considering a list put forward by the AER or any responsible party, that we would be able to see an accounting of

who isn't paying their taxes and how we might hold them accountable further down the line.

Of course, we are seeing through this clarity on municipal governments being able to recoup these funds if they are there, but we aren't seeing, necessarily, funds for boots on the ground to ensure that municipalities are able to take action. We aren't seeing an accounting of these corporations who are potentially bad actors, who are potentially setting up shop from county to county after not paying their taxes in a fair way.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On second reading of Bill 77, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 77, the Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021. I've enjoyed listening to debate and listening to members give way to other members, and I just want to start by saying that I'm a hundred per cent open to accepting interventions. I just ask for everyone's patience. It's a new process for me, and I want to say thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me some cheat sheet notes on how to do that.

Mr. Carson: I didn't get one of those.

Ms Goehring: It's because I've made mistakes, Member.

During the debate I've heard some members on this side of the House bring up some concerns and some questions, and I think that it's very valuable feedback that I hope that government is listening to. I think that any time we have stakeholders that are being impacted by legislation that comes out of this Chamber, they have a significant amount of contribution to that piece of legislation because ultimately it impacts them and how they're able to do their work.

When it comes to the municipalities, we've heard over and over that it's been very clear from the RMA what their asks have been. While I think it's important that we introduce this legislation and bring this legislation forward, albeit two years behind when it should have been introduced, I think that there are some realistic points that have been brought up about it not being enough. While municipalities are quite appreciative about this legislation, there are definitely some areas that could improve. I think about when we're asking municipalities to take the money that they have access to and be able to spend it in ways that they want to spend it.

I'm curious: how many ministries had this conversation? Over and over it seems that this government makes decisions in isolation. When we're looking at municipal government, there are many different ways that legislation is impacted. This one specifically has the words "municipal government" in the title, so I'm curious if other ministries had an impact on this actual legislation and if those things that were impacting their ministry had been considered. Some of the examples would be infrastructure, right? When a municipality has outstanding taxes and they aren't able to collect on that, there are things that suffer in that municipality, and unfortunately that can often be the infrastructure that they rely on as a community. Did the Minister of Infrastructure have an opinion about some of this?

Did the Minister of Culture have some input on this? As my role is critic for Culture, I'm hearing from municipalities across the entire province. Mostly I . . . [interjection] Just wait. Let me get my note. I'm happy to give way to the member.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Well, thank you, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, I'll do my best to shed some light on an area that I think the hon. member is asking for light to be shed on. The big issue here truly is

the oil and gas industry. It's simply because of the Virginia Hills court case. Municipalities have the right to put liens on things within their municipality when money is owed and collect from those assets. Really, the big issue here is oil and gas.

Now, some of the other questions are – I think somebody asked: well, did you talk to the municipalities? Yes, over and over and over again. This whole legislation was designed very much specifically for what the RMA was asking for. We talked to the energy industry members a bunch of times, which is why, you know, the RMA president has given supportive public quotes on this.

5:20

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for responding. I'm hearing over and over that they did speak to municipalities. I guess what we're asking is why their recommendations haven't been accepted. They're partially accepted, so when it comes to having more teeth to this piece of legislation, the municipalities, specifically the RMA, were asking for more. While this is a great first step, I think it's important to listen to those municipalities and those leaders when they're asking for more. [interjection] I would like to give way perhaps to the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Member. I'm excited to see the minister also standing up because maybe he'll listen to my comments, and maybe if he interjects again, he'll be able to answer my questions, too. Just following up with the comments being made around the municipalities and some of the recommendations that were made, I guess one of the questions that I have in all of this that I haven't really been able to get an answer for is that when we talk about insolvency and those businesses or those companies that have outstanding taxes that need to be paid to municipalities and even landowners, in fairness, that no longer exist, what we know is that they also have this ability to then re-create themselves under new names and maybe look at doing business in another municipality. So my one question that I do have, that I'm curious to hear – and I don't know if the member has heard this as well.

I didn't get to my question.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. It's taking some adjusting to get to these short little snippets. There's definitely more that I would like to hear. [interjection] I appreciate the minister wanting to also interject. Perhaps before he does, I would just like to mention some of the things that the municipalities are asking for that aren't part of this legislation.

In particular, the RMA has asked for additional tools to help with the collection; namely, stopping the AER from issuing licences to companies that don't pay their taxes. This was not included in this legislation. They've requested a more transparent public reporting through the AER to gain a better understanding of which companies are the bad actors. So I guess the question is that you're saying that you listened to them and you're implementing a piece of legislation that is what they've asked for, but perhaps the minister could explain, you know, why this didn't go as far as they're asking.

I would absolutely like to give way to the hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you. I'll go fast because I got caught short on the short time last time, so I'll try to give you a faster answer here. It's not part of this legislation, but ever so recently the Energy minister put in place directive 067, which means that the AER actually keeps track of which municipalities are behind on their taxes. What they do with that information is up to the AER, but that is something new the Energy minister put in ever so recently, though not through legislation, through a directive.

The other thing about multimunicipality debts is that almost all companies have the same banker across municipalities. I can assure you that if you don't pay your credit card in Calgary, they're going to collect from you in Edmonton and vice versa, and I think the same could be said for the oil and gas companies. If they're not paying their bills in one place, their banker is going to have a talk with them. That's not perfect, but you've got to admit that is leverage for when you owe money in one jurisdiction, paying it in one and not in the other.

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the hon. minister for that.

I think when we're looking at – again, it goes back to my comment of kind of making decisions in silos, so to say, “Don't worry; it's being addressed in another piece of legislation or in regulations” is a bit of “Trust us; it's happening somewhere else.” I think that this government has shown over and over – and we've heard from Albertans loud and clear that there is a level of concern when it comes to the lack of transparency in legislation and “Don't worry; we're going to do it in another area.” While I appreciate the feedback that it's going to be done in another ministry, it would be nice to see it in this piece of legislation.

There's definitely an ability through the legislation to have created what the municipalities are asking for, so when we're going through this debate, I would hope that, should amendments come through, this government is open to looking at them and to really listening to what municipalities are saying and to honestly be able to support them in what their asks are.

I think with that, Mr. Speaker, I will adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 75 Arts Professions Recognition Act

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 75, Arts Professions Recognition Act, 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.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment October 27: Mr. Shepherd speaking]

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has the call.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon and speak to Bill 75, the Arts Professions Recognition Act. As the Culture critic I have been receiving feedback, well, since this government was elected, in 2019, about the impacts of some of the decisions this government has made in the arts industry. Honestly, it hasn't been good. I know that we've heard over and over that this was a platform promise and that looking at an Arts Professions Recognition Act is something that this government wanted to do to put language to acknowledge the importance of arts in our community, which I believe is essential.

I think that by being able to do that – it was something that I know the arts community was definitely excited about. It was something that they were really, really looking forward to because we've seen since 2019, when this government came in to govern, that their language doesn't necessarily coincide with their actions. There's a disconnect. Out of one side they're saying, “Love the arts; we support performers,” yet there have been significant cuts to this industry.

Even prior to COVID there were cuts that directly impacted artists. We look at film and the impacts that those decisions have made on the arts community.

When we were debating their first budget, I know we had an incredible number of concerned artists attend the debate in estimates. It got to the point where the LAO actually had to open up another room for them to all be able to participate in it. Why did they show up? Because they were upset. When they looked at the amount of cuts that were happening in the arts community, to them it was signalling that arts are not important for this government.

When I've been consulting with so many about the potential of the Arts Professions Recognition Act, there was hope that maybe now the government would be able to do something that actually significantly signalled to the arts community that they were actually being supported, that perhaps those previous cuts were being reconsidered, that there would be a piece of legislation that would actually get artists back to work.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Bill 75, the Arts Professions Recognition Act, does nothing of the sort. It does not do anything to create jobs and support artists in the province. It takes legislation from Saskatchewan that the arts community generally said was a good piece of legislation, and they were supportive of that if that was how this government was going to proceed with the legislation here in Alberta. Some of the feedback that we've received from industry was that while Saskatchewan's was a good piece of legislation, it's 10 years old. When they look at things like the definition of an artist, they felt that it could be updated, that perhaps it could be more inclusive of different means of arts and professionals. An example would have been, like, digital arts. That was something that they felt could have been included.

5:30

Another piece of some feedback that I received was the Indigenous artists' definition of what an artist is or even perhaps how they look at the definition of the requirements for a professional artist. There are individuals that identify themselves as a cultural storyteller perhaps, and there is a fear that their contributions into the arts community, the significant contributions into sharing their stories of their culture, of their heritage are being missed in this legislation. There were some questions around: why is it not inclusive of perhaps some alternative thinking outside of what an artist is and what a professional artist is?

When I listen to the arts community talk about their passion and the excitement that they had for potential in this piece of legislation, the general feedback is disappointment. They are happy to see that this government is using language that would indicate that they are supportive of the arts community, which is commendable; however, there isn't actually action behind this legislation that does anything to get artists back to work.

When the pandemic started, the arts community arguably was the first industry that was hit. People couldn't sing, artists couldn't access their festivals where they're selling their beautiful artwork, whether it's beaded jewellery, whether it's still life, whether it's doing a performance for the street performers. That all stopped. Globally it stopped. Artists were pleading to have a voice at the table. They wanted to be part of this government's economic recovery plan. They wanted to have a voice at the table to say: this is what we need as artists, and as creative thinkers we can come up with ways that perhaps government didn't consider. That was at the very beginning of the pandemic, 20 months ago. [interjection] I would absolutely like to give way to the member. Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I was very interested in the member's comments about how this bill is being received. I think,

you know, that if there's one thing that I've noticed about the pandemic response generally on behalf of this government, besides the sort of last-and-least approach that I think has damaged a lot of things, it's that one of the things we notice in the pandemic is that some of the things we miss most aren't easily quantified, and I think the arts is definitely among them, so it's nice to see this bill, that this government is sort of finally recognizing that, but in light of their excluding the arts from the economic recovery panel, excluding them in other ways, failing to recognize them previously, in light of all the cuts, what is your sense in how the community is receiving this, whether they feel like this nod, at last, is meaningful?

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the hon. member. I think that's a really good question, and it's one that I know you and I have engaged in with art organizations in your community. We've talked directly to those that are providing arts to the less fortunate, to some of the vulnerable populations. I think that the general consensus is that it's not enough. It's something that this government can talk about and they can say all these wonderful things, but when it comes to actually following through and providing action, it's not here. This piece of legislation from Saskatchewan not only doesn't go far enough, but it has actually taken pieces out of the legislation in Saskatchewan that have a negative impact on artists.

When we look at Saskatchewan, some of the feedback that we've received is that they removed the piece about all people that engage with artists in contracts, so now the Alberta legislation only speaks to protecting contractual engagements with public entities and government. Why would you remove the expectation that anybody engaging in a contract with an artist is responsible? That is a huge concern. There are organizations out there that don't fall under the public entity. Why would you remove that? Why would you make it less than the Saskatchewan legislation? That signals to artists that they are only safe if they're doing contracts with certain entities, which tells them that, yes, sure, there's a tool kit available and they can print a contract, which they were appreciative of, but that contract doesn't mean anything if it's not an entity that this legislation has identified, so they can go ahead, they feel good, they have a contract, they wrote it out, they have it signed, but if it's not complied with, it doesn't fit under this piece of legislation.

So I'm curious why this government took that out of the legislation that was in Saskatchewan's. Instead of enhancing it and making it better for the arts community, they've taken away a giant piece that actually protects them. Not only does this legislation not do anything to actually create jobs; it makes it riskier for those entering into contracts with those that aren't identified in this legislation. This legislation is more restrictive. That again signals to the arts community that it's just language, that they're saying: look at what we did. [interjection] I would like to give way to the hon. minister.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the pretty simple answer to this is that the member doesn't understand that there is a vast body of contract law across this country. Any contract that is signed in this country, in this province by any entity with any other entity is a legal agreement that is entirely enforceable by a whole body of contract law. Our point here is to model the right way to do it, to encourage artists to do it. Once artists enter into a contract, that is as enforceable as any other kind of contract in this province. The goal here is to be a little bit like the Goldilocks story, not too hot, not too cold, to provide what's needed but not to create massive amounts of red tape and redo contract law that already exists in massive amounts.

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the minister for the education lesson in contract law. While I agree that there is legislation, the legislation that you're proposing is actually to protect under contract law. Why you would exclude it and say, "Don't worry; someone else will deal with it" is baffling to me. It was in the Saskatchewan legislation, so to say that piece isn't needed just simply doesn't make sense. Artists aren't believing it, Minister. When we're talking to artists about the impacts of some of the decisions that this government has made, we have seen mass exodus of incredible talent leave this province because of the decisions that this government has made.

In order to repair that relationship, there was a great opportunity for this government to come forward with legislation that shows that we value you, we see your importance on the impact on the economy, and we see how the arts community is here and talented and actually diversifying the economy, but instead, through Bill 75, we have legislation that does less than Saskatchewan and doesn't create any jobs. It provides contracts for two entities, and that's it. It's frustrating because this is a common response when government is asked: why aren't you doing enough? The arts community is saying: we need this. Like, this would have made it a little bit better, and instead you reduced it. For them to say, "Don't worry; it's being addressed in other pieces of legislation," that is not a reason to exclude an entity. [interjection] I'd like to give way to the hon. member.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I was really appreciating the member's comments. I think she's absolutely correct. While the minister is correct that contract law exists, the purpose of a bill like this is to add additional requirements. I think what the member is saying is that relative to the legislation in Saskatchewan, which said, you know, "Here are these additional requirements, and they apply to all contracts into which an artist enters," the Alberta legislation says, "Here are these additional requirements, and they apply only to contracts with certain agencies," which I suspect – and that is my question for the member. Do you have a sense of sort of how much protection this has given them? Relative to the legislation in Saskatchewan what kind of percentage do we think is going to be covered?

5:40

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the hon. member for that. The Saskatchewan legislation requires contracts, like I said, with anyone, so who is "anyone"? It's artists that are hired throughout the province. It could be a large-scale music festival. It could be your local pub. I know I've seen incredible live music at my local pub. There are some venues in the province that bring in some incredible bands and some incredible talent. It's shameful to think that because they're choosing to play at a venue that's able to take them, they're not under contract. So when it comes to the contracts that they are engaging with – if it does fall under the criteria that the government has, it's a public entity.

Artists are also saying that their employment is somewhat precarious, so as an artist they don't have benefits. They have an ask for things – I'm curious if they're going to be included in their tool box – like sick pay, WCB, OH and S, or other simple standards of employment that are expected for anybody else doing employment but excluded when you're an artist. [interjection] Unfortunately, I've already accepted three, and I'm no longer able to accept another intervention. Thank you. I'm getting it, Mr. Speaker. I mean, I am excited to see that the minister is jumping up and responding.

What I think needs to happen is that we need to look at some actual teeth to this piece of legislation. I would like to know that, as this debate moves along, there are opportunities for us to interact

and that amendments perhaps could be introduced and that this minister is actually listening to artists, listening to those that are impacted by these contracts, that they're impacted by the definition of "artist," impacted by the definition of "professional."

So while I've mentioned that the arts community was hopeful that this is here, one of the comments that I got from an industry leader was that, you know, they were very disappointed and said: it's a big nothing burger. It's a piece of legislation with words that say "arts," that say "recognition" but don't actually have any follow-through on supporting artists. I think that throughout this debate it would be really wonderful to hear from members opposite to hear what they've heard from the arts community. Like I said, I've talked to people all across this province, way up north to southern Alberta. There are some incredible opportunities in this province that can help diversify, that can help build our economy. Those voices, unfortunately, are just not being listened to. When we have an opportunity like this to talk about ways that we can actually recognize artists, why not put in place things that will actually benefit artists financially, that will actually create jobs that may perhaps give artists an incentive to stay in the province and to not leave the province?

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to end my comments. I'm excited to listen to the rest of the debate.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this bill. You know, as my hon. colleague was mentioning, I mean, we're quite supportive of the arts community in our caucus. As many people probably know, many of us sit on the Folk Fest hill in August whenever we're able to. It's one of our favourite activities, I think, to do. We also have many musicians in our caucus who, obviously, have performed in live venues in past lives, and some continue to do so as well. This is an issue that we're quite concerned with and, I think, rightfully so because of the fact that it's been such a rough couple of years – or 20 months, I guess, would be a prime example – for the industry.

I mean, we recognize that, you know, with COVID there were obviously restrictions that needed to be put in place so that everybody was being safe and we weren't causing any spread. We know that even in this House when we're not able to sing the national anthem and things like that because we're abiding by the protocols. The concern that's come out of that and the recognition that I think the government needs to do and have is that it also speaks to the volatility of the arts community in the sense of employment and being able to generate an income. When the economy shifts and when things like pandemics happen and, obviously, not being able to perform or to be able to have art shows or different things like that, then, obviously, there is a financial impact to many of the performers.

Now we see this piece of legislation being introduced that's supposed to address some of that, yet what we're hearing is that it has actually missed the mark completely. What we know right now is that for an artist in Alberta the median income is about \$28,000, 51 per cent lower than most average Alberta workers. Artists, obviously, go to postsecondary, and even though many of them will graduate with a bachelor's degree, they'll only generate about an average \$30,000 a year, which is 55 per cent less than someone that has similar education working in a different field. I mean, that's based on the census. Yet at the same time what we see is that the industry generates about \$1.3 billion in GDP when we're able to all enjoy our activities and be able to go out and be at music venues and art shows and plays and all those things, so there is a return here that needs to be acknowledged and be respected and, in doing that,

needs to support the very people that are working in this area because it is a pretty substantial contributor to the GDP.

I mean, again, we've heard even from members in the last couple of days talking about the new Netflix shows that are being made in Alberta and *Ghostbusters* that was made in Alberta and all of these things that we like to brag about, yet at the same time when we ask and hear from our artists, they're saying: well, we need some more employment security around that. As my hon. colleague just mentioned, Saskatchewan has acknowledged this, and they've obviously done a little bit of a better job. I would think that given the close relationship between the party here and the party there they would have had a conversation about what that means and what that looks like.

Now, outside of the employment component, something that I would be very interested in – and if the minister would like to stand, I would give way after my questions to him – is around the COVID response.

The Speaker: I might just apologize for being a little more interventionist than perhaps – I'm sure that the member was just about to tie this into how we are on amendment REF1 as opposed to on the main bill.

Ms Sweet: We're on an amendment?

The Speaker: That is correct. We are on amendment REF1, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be more than happy to refer it back. I mean, I think I'm getting there. Why it should be referred is basically, as my colleague was mentioning, because it hasn't hit the mark when it comes to actually providing the supports that the arts industry is asking for. They've been very clear in their consultations, and in the consultations that my colleague did, she clearly heard from the industry that they didn't feel that it was going to meet the supports and even meet the basic levels that the Saskatchewan model does.

5:50

I mean, clearly, if you're going to put a piece of legislation forward and you're going to name it the Arts Professions Recognition Act, the least you could do is recognize the workers that are actually working in it and then provide them with the supports that they're asking for. Of course, it should not be read, and it should be referred for more consultation on all of the things because it's not going to do what it needs to do.

There's also this really interesting discrepancy in the bill, that I'd be really curious to hear about, when it comes to the definitions. When I see definitions in the legislation, it's:

"artist" means any individual who creates, performs, gives creative expression to or works in any artistic field, including the following:

- (i) literary arts;
- (ii) visual arts and crafts;
- (iii) electronic, recording and media arts . . . film . . . ;
- (iv) performing arts, including theatre, opera, music, dance . . . circus and variety entertainment;
- (v) an artistic field prescribed in the regulations.

That's a pretty broad spectrum. My curiosity would be: who was consulted by this government in those different areas? What we've seen over the last little bit is that there have been COVID supports and funding that have been provided under different programs by this government that have disproportionately supported rodeo over every other sector. My question would be – and maybe this could be part of the consult when the referral amendment is voted on; we'll see what happens – was that the primary group that was consulted with, or

were other arts consulted with? Were performance venues such as the Citadel spoken to? Was IATSE consulted with, being the union that represents most of these performing artists?

Small contractors that work in other jurisdictions, in B.C. and in Saskatchewan, who move between provinces quite often working as contractors to do documentaries or to work on certain projects, are obviously being impacted, so it would tie in with some of the other legislation that has been introduced in the House recently. Part of that is that if you're going to recognize the arts and you're going to say that you know that part of their work is that they move between provinces, you would think – you would think – that you would want to make sure that the province's legislation when it comes to workers' rights would be aligned with all the other provinces. Was that done, and if it wasn't done, why wasn't it done? Why wouldn't the government want to make sure that we're aligned with the other jurisdictions that are also offering these supports? I think, again, that if you want to do a crossjurisdictional analysis, then . . . [interjection] I'll give way.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. You know, I concur, just reading the bill in a very cursory sort of way. It didn't take long because there's not much here, quite frankly. One of the things that I think bears the responsibility of referring to artists in the broadest way and to contract law as well – as the minister pointed out, this is trying to plug people into the existing structures of contract law. I mean, why wouldn't artists already have that as a right available to them? Maybe this bill helps to remind people that they should engage with artists just like they engage with anybody else, like a plumber coming to fix your taps or whatever, right? But that linkage already did exist, so to say that you're defining a professional artist in this way precludes the fact that people have a right to contract law in the first place.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Member, and I agree. I think that, you know, in hearing from stakeholders, they also agree, right? They will say and they do say that most artists don't have access to the same social benefits as other workers do, and the majority of them also rely on spouses and partners to be able to provide those benefits: the basics of health care, the basics of CPP, a retirement future. All of those things are primarily relied on with their partner. Looking at being able to make sure that our artists, who contribute to our society, who have a benefit to our GDP, have the same access and protections, I think, is important.

I mean, the one other thing I want to highlight – and I think the minister would want to make sure that he's aware of this because, of course, he has other responsibilities and portfolios that he has an associate minister responsible for – is that we know that arts primarily is 60 per cent women. Sixty per cent in culture and arts are women. In Alberta it's higher than the national average, and it's the second highest in the country, so pretty substantial.

If we're going to acknowledge and if the government is going to say that they're going to acknowledge women in this and create an Associate Minister of Status of Women and not a minister anymore,

they might want to do some work that makes sure that the women that are working in this area have those supports. I guess my question would also be – and that can be part of the referral and why it needs to go back to be reviewed – how many women were consulted? How many women were spoken to about this and were able to have and be part of the conversation about what they needed for supports? We know that child care would probably be an issue. We know that health care is an issue. We know all of those things. We want to make sure that when we're looking at this area and we're looking at supports and benefits, that is what is happening. [interjection] Sorry; you're behind me.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to interject on that point because I think the idea of what we're seeing in here around written contracts is so vague, just like the rest of the bill. I have many questions, one of them being that if a contract is negotiated or entered into – and, of course, there is no prescription here about what that contract should look like, whether it should cover WCB, whether it's about how many hours in a week. I mean, there seems to be so many holes in what we're seeing here. The fact is that if a public entity was to not follow through with these written contracts, I don't see any course of action for a professional artist or somebody in the arts profession to actually hold that public entity accountable. So I would question: what is the next step, and why isn't that included in here? If this minister is so serious about protecting these professional artists, why isn't it included?

Thank you.

Ms Sweet: Okay. This back-and-forth thing is so – I don't know. I can't see my hon. colleagues behind me.

I think it's a good point. I mean, of course, the referral is going back to Economic Future, so I think part of the conversation around that referral and going to that committee would also be the conversation about: what is the impact that COVID had on many of these workers? If many of them entered into contracts at that time and then we had the yo-yo of what's happened over the last 20 months, with venues opening and saying, "We're going to have live bands for the next couple of weeks," all excited, and they've hired all these bands and these bands have expected to be compensated for performances, only then to hear, "Well, we're being shut down again because we're now in a fourth wave, which could potentially be a fifth wave," the question would then be: what does that compensation look like? Of course, the venue is also not generating any income. The performers aren't going to be compensated because there isn't going to be anybody in there, and they're going to cancel their shows. Over the last 20 months how much has been impacted? Well, we know that venues have been substantially impacted, but how many were . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(1)(c) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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