



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 15, 2021

Day 125

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 15, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing for the playing of our national anthem.

Recording:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika, the Deputy Government House Leader.

Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a good day for Alberta families. Our government, in partnership with the government of Canada, announced a \$3.8 billion investment in early learning and child care. The past three years have been difficult for Albertans. Faced with an economic recession, the downturn in the price of oil, and the effects of the pandemic, it's been challenging, to say the least; however, Albertans are very resilient.

While our economy is once again on the rise, this investment will make life easier for Albertans. First and foremost, child care will be more affordable for all families. By early next year families will see their child care fees reduced by half on average, and by 2026 all families will pay on average \$10 per day. This made-in-Alberta plan can be the difference between one parent staying at home to care for their children or continuing to work or returning to school, which, in turn, jump-starts our economic recovery.

But, while important, this agreement is so much more than affordability. As a rural MLA I know that it is often difficult for those in rural areas to access child care. Sometimes it's just not available. However, our government made certain that this agreement would create private and nonprofit spaces all across Alberta, prioritizing the areas in the greatest need and the programs that parents choose, areas like Fort McMurray and High Level, that not only need more child care options but also flexibility in the options that are available currently; workers in the oilfield, health care, and our first responders that need child care outside of standard hours. Families in these and other areas across our province will benefit

from our made-in-Alberta plan because this plan respects the choices that families make.

As this plan is rolled out over the coming weeks, months, and years, our families, communities, and, most importantly, our children will all benefit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, today, after months of delay and intense pressure from Albertans, the UCP finally announced they have reached an agreement with the federal government for \$10-per-day child care for Albertans. This agreement will make a big difference to Alberta families and the economy, which is why the Alberta NDP have been fighting for it from day one. This agreement comes in spite of the clear ideological and political objections of the UCP, because they've never believed in universal affordable child care. One of the first orders of business of the UCP government was to cancel the \$25-per-day child care program that we introduced. If the UCP had really been focused on affordability, they would have expanded it.

When she faced criticism, the Minister of Children's Services ignored what operators and the families who participated in this program had to say, refused to meet with any of them, and even clawed back some of their funding, all while reducing funding, quality standards, and supports for the sector as a whole. Then, when presented with an opportunity from the federal government for transformational investment in universal affordable child care in Alberta, the minister and the Premier focused on political games, stalling, and posturing. The irony is that if the UCP had shown leadership from day one on child care and not cancelled the \$25-per-day program, we would have been further ahead today. Average child care costs in Alberta are \$51 per day. Had the UCP expanded our program, Albertans would already have \$25-per-day child care.

Back in July we did the work and put forward a proposal for a deal with the federal government. Let's be clear. The agreement announced today by the UCP is our NDP proposal. The failure of the UCP to commit to universal affordable child care from the beginning . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. members will know that there's a long tradition inside this Assembly of Members' Statements going uninterrupted. If the member would like to restart her member's statement, she would be welcome to do so.

Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement (continued)

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, after months of delay and intense pressure from Albertans, the UCP finally announced that they have reached an agreement with the federal government for \$10-per-day child care. This agreement will make a big difference to Alberta families and the economy, which is why the Alberta NDP have been big supporters of this from day one. This agreement comes in spite of the clear ideological and political objections of the UCP, because they've never believed in universal affordable child care. One of the first orders of business of the UCP government was to cancel the \$25-per-day child care program that we introduced. If the UCP had really been serious about affordability, they would have expanded that program like we intended.

When she faced criticism, the Minister of Children's Services ignored what operators and families who participated in that program

had to say, refused to meet with any of them, and even clawed back some of their funding, all while reducing funding, quality standards, and supports for the sector as a whole. Then, when presented with an opportunity from the federal government for transformational investment in universal affordable child care, the minister and the Premier focused on political games, stalling, and posturing. The irony is that if the UCP had shown leadership from day one on child care and not cancelled the \$25-per-day program, we would have been further ahead today than we are. Average child care costs in Alberta are \$51 per day. Had the UCP expanded our program as intended, Albertans would already have \$25-per-day child care.

Back in July of this year we did the work and put forward a proposal for a deal with the federal government. Let's be clear. The agreement announced today by the UCP is exactly our proposal. The failure of the UCP to commit to universal affordable child care from the beginning has impacted Alberta families, those who work in and operate child care, Alberta children, and our economy, but Albertans have been relentless and used their voices to demand that a deal be signed. So today to all of the Albertans who have fought for this day: thank you. This announcement is all due to you. You demanded universal and affordable quality child care for Alberta families and our economy. You forced this government to change course. Alberta finally has the child care support we deserve, and the credit belongs to Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

David "Mo" Armstrong

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. September 1977 was a big deal for me. It's the year I moved across the street from Claresholm elementary to H.T. Coutts school. The beginning of grade 5: a new school and three new teachers. I knew, too, that the unknown was Mr. David Armstrong. Mr. A., as he was known to his students, was originally from Oklahoma, and that only added to the mystery. Dave's dad, Neill, was a professional football player and then a coach whose job took him and his family to places like Winnipeg, Houston, Philadelphia, and in 1964 to Edmonton. Mr. A., or Mo to his friends, graduated from the U of A in 1975, moved to Claresholm, and began what would be a 31-year teaching career in that community. He wooed his wife, Janie, from Oklahoma to the subarctic prairies of southern Alberta, where they raised their two children, Cayley Sioux and Quade Forrest.

Technically a teacher, Mr. A. was really and truly a storyteller. For example, he wove our weekly spelling tests into short stories. He read aloud to us from C.S. Lewis and Tolkien in his own captivating way. A friend reminded me recently that because of this, we grew up believing that hobbits spoke with slight southern drawls. Mr. A. befriended and believed in me, telling a story not just of who I was but who I could become.

1:40

Mo and Janie lived on Barley Acres, just down the road from my family farm. This proximity allowed us to stay in touch past school days, enjoying visits about football, listening to music and other various stories. Most of the years I'd known him, Mo and his brother Neill were writing a book. As students we were given early glimpses into the lives of Ploox Plucowski and Nicky Neill. Years of writing and rewriting resulted in the *Adventures with Ploox* finally being published as a trilogy in 2011. A couple of weeks ago we learned Ploox was coming to the big screen, exciting but bittersweet news as almost two years ago Mo was diagnosed with

cancer, and on November 5, while listening to his special playlist, he passed peacefully, surrounded by his family.

Mr. A., on behalf of the hundreds of lives you've impacted, thank you. Thank you for being part of my story and for letting me call you Mo.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Bilous: With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and the reduction in face-to-face interactions we've become even more reliant on technology, which has resulted in a global tech boom. Jurisdictions around the world are seeing record levels of tech investment, and while we've seen some of this investment come to Alberta, it's in spite of the UCP government, not because of them.

While the UCP tries to take credit for everyone else's work, the credit for this investment goes to the hard-working tech entrepreneurs who have grown the ecosystem over the past several years. Upon coming into office, the UCP declared economic diversification a luxury and cut support for the tech sector. They replaced it with a corporate tax cut that does nothing for start-ups. In fact, a recent report shows that the UCP's cutting of the interactive digital media tax credit means Alberta's missing out on investment and jobs.

Out of the investments that have been announced, not one has mentioned the UCP's corporate tax cut; instead, they've all mentioned access to talent. While Alberta has a young and talented workforce, the UCP has gutted the postsecondary institutions that provide the talent pipelines that these companies will rely on now and into the future. So while the UCP focuses on things that do nothing to attract tech investment, they've cut the very things that the tech companies are asking for. As a result, we're actually losing ground compared to other jurisdictions in Canada; as they smash previous investment records, Alberta struggles to keep pace.

If we want to attract long-term investment and create jobs in the tech sector, we need to bring back supports like the investor tax credit and the interactive digital media tax credit while creating an Alberta venture fund. And we need to invest in postsecondaries, not cut them by \$700 million. The tech sector is vital to Alberta's future. It's vital to job creation. There are real solutions being put forward by Alberta's NDP Official Opposition that I encourage the government to review and consider implementing themselves.

Provincial Police Service Feasibility Study

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, our communities need a policing model that keeps the well-being of our communities at a top priority. Recommendation 14 of the Fair Deal Panel suggests creating an Alberta police service to replace the RCMP. Our government is committed to the safety and security of all Albertans. Following these recommendations, Alberta's government hired PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada in October of 2020 to study the feasibility of replacing the RCMP in Alberta with a provincial police service. This report explores the operational needs, processes, and potential transition cost. It puts forward a provincial model to put more front-line personnel in communities across Alberta, all at a total cost equal to or lower than the total cost of the current RCMP police model.

The proposed model presents an innovative approach to service delivery and governance that could better address the root causes of crime, and it also highlights built-in partnerships with mental health and addiction personnel. This report also offers to establish a provincial police commission and commissions at the local level to increase the accountability of the system. A vital element of this plan is an enhancement of community policing with an increased emphasis on local recruiting and retention. This model focuses on

working with Albertans for the well-being and safety of communities across our province.

This is about the right police model for the safety of all Albertans, and I want to thank and honour the men and women serving our community. I look forward to providing them with a system and an employer that can provide more accountability. Our heroes in blue are also Albertans that deserve a fair deal, and I believe this is a step in the right direction.

Women's Workforce Participation

Ms Phillips: Alberta women's economic security, our jobs, and earnings have taken a massive hit during COVID. This is in no small part due to the ideological blinders worn by a UCP cabinet whose view of women is a throwback to the era of the horse and buggy. Let's start with how the UCP cabinet belittled women looking for affordable child care. The UCP shut down a program that kept fees at \$25 a day. That program employed people, mostly women, in the child care sector and meant that middle-income families would have a little help with their bills. It meant women didn't have to choose between using their entire take-home pay for the second mortgage that is the monthly child care bill and, on the other hand, taking a few years out of the workforce, which hurts their overall earning power for their entire lives.

Without the voices of Alberta women, there would be no child care deal with the federal government. The economic and social benefits of gender equality are not only not a priority; they're, in fact, antithetical to the UCP cabinet's view of the male breadwinner structure of the economy. Indeed, Alberta women are the last to benefit from the federal child care money because of the UCP cabinet's priority on little political tantrums rather than helping families with the bottom line. The UCP as a party was the first in line for Ottawa's federal COVID benefits for their staff, but women are last in Canada to get Ottawa's help with child care.

Now, it's not just the social conservatives who hold views offside of the Alberta mainstream. The jobs minister told the media that women were coming back into the workforce after they took some time off during COVID. Took some time off? Allow me to correct the minister by speaking directly to Alberta women, to the women of Alberta who have had to leave the workforce because of the lack of child care, who had their jobs disrupted through the lack of paid sick leave, whose lives and work were turned upside down because of the pandemic mismanagement of the government and whose children were sent home from school again and again, who had to shutter their businesses because the UCP failed time and again to take action to fight the pandemic. To Alberta women: your NDP MLAs recognize and respect your contribution to our economy, our health, and our future as a province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Affordable Energy

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently 7.9 billion people inhabit the planet. Of these, 1.3 billion have no electricity; a further 3 billion have inadequate supply. If a goal was established to provide the world's poor with as much access to energy as the average Canadian – and why wouldn't that be a goal? – world energy production would need to quadruple. The challenge, then, is: what sources should this energy come from, and what should be those sources' characteristics? A legitimate test of any selected

energy source should include these characteristics: ethical, abundant, reliable, scalable, and affordable.

Conspicuously, affordability receives the least focus. It is indisputable that affordable energy is essential for a good standard of living. However, many are engaged in doing all they can to make energy unaffordable. Carbon taxes are a case in point. Carbon taxes have demonstrably failed to reduce consumption. All they've proven to do is drive up the cost. This outcome impacts the poor disproportionately.

Moreover, this futile tax enables renewable energy to appear more financially viable versus fossil fuels. If you regard carbon dioxide as a pollutant which will, if unchecked, destroy the planet in 10 years, you would be inclined to champion energy sources that emit zero carbon dioxide. You will also, based on your initial prejudice, afford less consideration to the other characteristics. Alternatively, if you believe carbon dioxide is essential for life on Earth, you will concern yourself less about its marginal increase in the atmosphere. This perspective enables you to concentrate on all the test characteristics.

I'm in the latter camp. My preference is that we compare all sources available, paying particular attention to any distortion created by subsidies and other artificial costs. This is precisely what I will be doing over the coming months. It is vital that we produce affordable energy for all. Nobody can pretend to care about the poor when they embrace policies that drive up energy costs.

Mental Health Supports for First Responders

Ms Renaud: In an auditorium filled with hundreds of uniformed firefighters, EMT, police, and Armed Forces, St. Albert firefighter Warren Hillier was lovingly remembered this past Friday. Warren Hillier died by suicide on November 6. Warren's wife, Michele, bravely shared some of her husband's struggles. Default to open is how she described her eulogy, and it was that. It was an unfiltered look into how destructive and deadly posttraumatic stress disorder and critical incident stress are. Following three tours with the Canadian Armed Forces, Warren joined the St. Albert integrated fire and EMS. Soon after, Warren married his wife, and they had a son, Hudson. Michele described her husband's battle with an illness he contracted at work followed by acute withdrawal, isolation, depression, and then abuse.

Death of first responders by suicide is a national tragedy. Imagine the uncertainty of going to work prepared to deal with what will most certainly be the worst day of someone's life, day after day after day. Death, injury, fear, panic, pain, loss are the daily traumatic realities of first responders. Imagine for a moment what it must be like to smell burning insulation or feel intense heat through protective gear, the sounds of fire, or the eeriness of black, dense smoke. We can't really know the daily trauma and stress first responders run towards, but we can know that traumatic injuries to mental health are as deadly as the cancers caused in the line of duty.

1:50

Default to open. Alberta is not doing enough to support the mental health of first responders. Alberta's NDP put forward some ideas to help. We have legislation before this House to ensure presumptive WCB coverage for first responders. We've called for five mental health sessions for every Albertan as part of universal health care coverage. These ideas are merely a start. We also commit to listening and to learning from tragedies like this.

I want to extend my deepest condolences to the Hillier family and the entire St. Albert first responder community. It's time for us to be there for these heroes, like they're there for us.

Oral Question Period

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

Surgery Wait Times

Ms Notley: Fifteen thousand: Mr. Speaker, that's how many Albertans had their surgeries cancelled because of this fourth wave, one made worse by UCP inaction and ineptitude, a failure worthy of censure, I think. Today more Albertans than ever are waiting in pain, waiting for hope. To date this government has not presented a plan for rescheduling their surgeries, and there is no timeline for returning surgical capacity. To the Premier: do you have a plan to get these surgeries back on track? If so, where is it, and if not, when can we actually expect to see something more than vague generalities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for that very important question. First off, I want to state that I feel for all the patients and the families who have had their surgeries postponed to enable us to deal with the fourth wave, and I also want to thank all of the health care workers, who have done such a tremendous job in stepping up not only to continue as many surgeries as possible but to deal with those who are suffering from COVID. As I announced a number of weeks ago, 15,000 surgeries, unfortunately, were postponed. That number continues to rise, but I will in the next answer talk about the plan going forward.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you want to see the consequence of this government's failure to act this summer, open the paper and read about Sharon Durham. After surgery to remove the cancer behind her eye, she was to undergo another surgery to rehabilitate her nose, but that will never happen now. Instead, she will wear prosthetics for the rest of her life when she finally gets her surgery. Right now Albertans are waiting for everything from hysterectomies to heart surgeries. Can the Premier please tell these Albertans when they will get their operations? When will we see a plan? We need details. Albertans deserve details.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated several weeks ago, we are working with AHS in terms of developing a detailed plan, but we are not out of the woods yet. Even though the measures that our government has put in place have enabled the number of cases to come down and hospitalizations are continuing to decline – so are ICU cases – even as of today it looks like we're just going to be dropping below 100 ICU COVID cases. Our ICU capacity is still 130 per cent above normal. We're moving those resources in to catch up on surgeries as we speak.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in addition to the disastrous handling of the fourth wave this summer, this government has spent almost all of its mandate attacking front-line health care: a war on doctors, threats to fire 11,000 workers, chaotic privatization efforts, and a pandemic mismanagement by ministers more concerned about vacations than vaccinations. It's gotten so bad that the number of Albertans reportedly seeking surgery in the U.S. has doubled. Why doesn't this government stop attacking health care, start investing for the future, and, once again, give Albertans a plan for how they are going to fix the disaster they've created?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we fully support our health care workers, and again I want to thank our health care workers for their

tremendous work, not only maintaining surgeries as much as possible through this challenging time but being able to provide supports to Albertans. As I announced previously, I am pleased to say and inform this House that in terms of cancer surgeries we're up to 100 per cent. Two weeks ago we were performing roughly two-thirds of all surgeries, and we continue to increase that amount. I look forward to coming into the House and actually releasing to all Albertans in the coming weeks our plan not only to get to 100 per cent but to exceed 100 per cent.

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

Ms Notley: Well, we've been looking forward to it for a while.

COVID-19 in Schools

Ms Notley: Now, as cases rose in August, parents asked this government to protect their kids in school. Instead, these folks over there cancelled contact tracing in schools, then went on vacation. Mr. Speaker, according to FOIP documents their best summer ever started with firing 1,400 contact tracers without a care for students, and that's why by the end of September there were more than 700 schools with alerts or outbreaks. Why did the Premier think that firing the people tracing cases in schools, just as cases were going up, was a good idea?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, in terms of contact tracing, AHS has been doing this diligently, and since January 9, 2021, we've been contacting and investigating all COVID-19 cases they receive each and every day. They're reaching out to the cases within 24 hours of receiving confirmation of their positive test results, and – this is an extremely important point – throughout all of this, including the fourth wave, there has been no backlog in case investigation or contact tracing since the second wave. We are continuing to provide supports for Albertans on this, including in schools.

Ms Notley: There can't be a backlog if you cancel it, Mr. Speaker. Really.

You know, the data from Alberta Health is clear. Since the school year started, the most new COVID infections per capita are happening among those 19 and younger, yet the Member for Calgary-South East is peddling the same old misinformation that kids can't get and can't experience severe symptoms. On top of that, he is co-chairing the child wellness panel. Really, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier roll back protections for children in school like this member asked, or if not, will he remove him from his child wellness panel?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we've put in measures to be able to support all Albertans. The REP has been incredibly successful in terms of getting down the spread. Daily cases are continuing to drop, hospitalizations continue to drop, and the ICU count continues to drop. The REP also had the added benefit of increasing vaccination: 88 per cent, or just underneath that, for first dose, 82 per cent for second dose. We will continue to make sure we have the measures in place to support all Albertans, including our children and including in schools.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, after four waves one would think these guys would have learned something. Now, in Europe they're seeing troubling signs of a fifth wave, one that experts say is driven mainly by two things: relatively low vaccination rates, similar to what we have right now in Alberta, and the lack of vaccines for children. These trends are worrisome and would suggest we may

still be vulnerable right here at home. Public education is therefore critical. So will the Premier stand and condemn the dangerous misinformation peddled by the Member for Calgary-South East?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government supports all Albertans. One of the mandates that I have been given is to increase vaccinations, and that has largely been successful. Since September we have increased by over 10 points for first doses, more than that for second doses. We will continue to support Albertans. We know that the best way through the fourth wave and to protect Albertans against future waves is through vaccinations. We will continue to support that and increase vaccinations, and I look forward to saying more when we have the vaccinations for ages five to 11 approved.

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

COVID-19 Response and Premier's Leadership

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, hundreds dead, tens of thousands sick, and 15,000 critical surgeries and counting cancelled: the devastating effect of the fourth wave of COVID-19 will be felt forever, and it was all preventable. But the Premier went on vacation and left no one in charge during the worst public health crisis we have ever faced. Today I will bring to this House a motion to formally censure the Premier. The Premier has dismissed it. Will anyone in the government rise and urge the Premier to take this motion seriously?

Mr. Copping: As we've said many times in this House and have acknowledged, the move to manage COVID as endemic back in July was, frankly, too soon, but we responded to the fourth wave. We responded by putting in measures such as the REP and taking other measures. Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my earlier answers, these measures are working. Daily cases are down, hospitalizations are down, and the ICU cases are down. Now, we're not out of the woods yet. We are continuing to focus on increasing our vaccination rates so we can protect Albertans and protect each other.

2:00

Mr. Sabir: The Minister of Finance is second-in-command, the Government House Leader is third, the Minister of Energy is fourth, yet the Premier either left none of them in charge or is not up front with the House about who was actually responsible for the devastating fourth wave. All three of those ministers have constituents they represent, constituents who lost loved ones, had their surgeries cancelled, and are dealing with the long-term health effects caused by COVID-19. Will any of those ministers stand up in this House and support my motion to formally censure this Premier, and if not, why not? Your . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we are continuing our work in terms of managing through the fourth wave. I want to take this opportunity not only to thank all Alberta health care workers for the tremendous job they've done responding not only to the fourth wave but then catching up on surgeries, but I'd also like to thank all Albertans for following the rules set forth by our chief medical officer of health and for stepping up and getting vaccinated. Early in the fourth wave we pivoted to put new measures in place, including the REP and additional measures. Numbers are coming down. We're very pleased to see that. We're not out of the woods yet, but we need to keep focused on that.

Mr. Sabir: The Premier's horrible failure to manage the COVID-19 pandemic has hammered our economy and will delay our

recovery. Provinces like B.C., Ontario, and Quebec created new jobs while Alberta lost thousands of jobs last month, and many left the workforce. The Premier is now making a big job announcement to cover his tracks, but it won't undo the damage he has done. With all this in mind, this question is for the minister of economic development. Stand in this House and declare that he supports censuring the Premier for his failure to lead, which has cost our economy so . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we continue to focus on our response to COVID-19. Again, as I indicated, I'm very thankful to all Albertans and our health care workers for the tremendous efforts they've done so far, and we see the numbers continue to go down. You know, one of the key mandates that the Premier gave me as Minister of Health is to focus on: how do we get ready for whatever COVID is going to throw at us, make sure that we have capacity, now and into the future, not only to catch up on surgeries but be able to respond to future COVID-19 waves? We'll be ready for that.

Election Finances Legislation

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, over the last four quarters Alberta's NDP has outraised the UCP in every quarter. Now we see the UCP government trying to change the rules around political donations, perhaps because they can't seem to win a fair fight, one based on the desires of grassroots Albertans. Why is the Premier trying to reintroduce loopholes into the election financing laws to permit unlimited donations by Alberta's most wealthy? Why not accept that the current fundraising laws are fair and Albertans just do not support this government?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous. We are getting rid of big money in politics. We are actually, you know, plugging the loophole that the NDP has used to rig our elections in this province for years. It is called the Alberta Federation of Labour loophole. That is exactly what Bill 81 is meant to accomplish, and I am glad that finally Albertans will get the chance to get NDP big money out of our politics. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Gray: According to a University of Calgary political scientist the UCP government's changes would, quote, create a back door to solicit contributions above the minimum and then transfer them into the campaign. In short, the UCP government is trying to reopen the floodgates to big money. The record is clear. The NDP put a stop to deep-pocketed donors to protect Alberta's democracy, but this UCP government values their party's bottom line above all else. Will the Premier explain why this government thinks that giving big-money friends more influence over politics is a priority?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt in my mind that that question was written by Gil McGowan. You know what? Gil McGowan is actually written into the NDP constitution. In section 7 the Alberta Federation of Labour and Gil McGowan get to control the Alberta NDP. This is the source of their frustration. Albertans elected us to make sure that not one special-interest group can control the elections. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans rejected the cash-for-access, pay-to-play politics of the former PC Party, but somehow this UCP Premier didn't get the message. This bill would allow unlimited

donations to flow to political parties, and that is a fact. I know that the Premier and the UCP are having fundraising problems, but there has to be a better solution than destroying democracy. My final question to the Premier is simple. Will the government support an amendment to put back in place the annual cap on all personal donations to political parties?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta NDP is the most undemocratic party in the history of political parties. You know . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta NDP is the most undemocratic party in the history of political parties anywhere in the world. They are pissed off because Gil McGowan is right now on their neck. You know, we have tabled a bill that will make it easier for all Albertans to be involved in our politics. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is on his feet.

Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every child deserves the best possible start in life, and all parents should have the ability to build both a family and a career. Earlier this year the federal government announced their intent to create a Canada-wide system for early learning and child care. Over the summer we saw province after province reach and sign an agreement with the government of Canada. However, here in Alberta we announced our agreement just today. To the Minister of Children's Services: why did it take so long for us to reach an agreement?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to talk about the agreement that we announced today. This is a very positive day for parents right across Alberta. Colleagues in this House will be well aware that we tried to get a deal signed before the federal government called the election, an election that nobody asked for and I don't think Canadians really wanted. That said, it delayed us for about four weeks, and then we had a couple of weeks delay while we waited for cabinet to be appointed. But I can tell you that on October 3 we presented an action plan to the federal government addressing all of their questions, a plan supported by private and nonprofit operators right across Alberta, and now we've got that done.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that in Quebec when a universal child care type system was implemented, not only did the quality of child care suffer but many private operators were driven out of business, resulting in a child care shortage, and given that Alberta is a mixed-market child care system in which many programs are privately run by female entrepreneurs, can the Minister of Children's Services please explain how she intends to prevent a similar situation happening here in Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. minister is the only one with the call.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, many of our discussions with the federal government were, in fact, around our mixed-market system, something that matters for Alberta child care

operators and parents who are choosing those spaces for their children. The deal that we announced today not only respects and reflects the choices that parents are making, but we get to learn from what happened in Quebec and learn from the downfalls of the \$25-a-day pilot. We can address the issues that Albertans raised and deliver a plan that meets the unique and diverse needs of Alberta parents, children, and child care operators.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that affordability is not the only thing that matters to Alberta parents and that this agreement also includes aspects for accessibility, quality, and inclusion and given that our government negotiated to create a made-in-Alberta plan that actually works for families and communities across our province, again to the Minister of Children's Services: what else can Alberta parents expect from this agreement?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This plan means \$300 million to support early childhood educators in spaces right across this province. This matters because we know that educators are the key to high-quality early learning and child care. This also means more than 42,000 new child care spaces in areas of need across the province, not just in areas of political expediency like the \$25 pilot program that we had a couple of years back. We're also supporting inclusive child care in areas outside of Edmonton, right across this province for children who have special, diverse, or unique needs. This is a plan that works for Alberta parents. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:10

Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: Today Albertans should have been able to finally see the recommendations of the UCP's own coal panel, but once again the report is delayed, and the government is continuing to leave the door open to coal mining in the eastern slopes. Now Albertans won't get to see the highly anticipated report until New Year's Eve. We've seen this before, many times, with the UCP trying to hide the bad news from Albertans while they are distracted. Can Albertans assume that the government is so upset with them that they will be getting coal from them literally over the holidays?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy and her team are working very, very hard to bring together all of the feedback that Albertans have provided through the coal committee, and we'll come forward in the new year with significant recommendations to make sure that we got that right here inside our province. The only people trying to hide things are actually the Official Opposition. They're trying to distract from the fact that Alberta is leading the entire country in economic recovery and that we're moving forward despite the fact that the NDP keep betting against Albertans and trying to hold us down.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that last week a study by Jennifer Winter from the University of Calgary concluded that when it comes to mining coal, quote, the net economic benefit is minimal, end quote, and given that we know that the environmental impact is very significant and in the coal panel's own survey over 90 per cent of participants have made it clear that they don't want to see coal

mining in the eastern slopes and given that the conclusion should be clear and that most Albertans would expect the government to make the right decision, can the minister explain why the panel would need more time at all when Albertans have made it so clear that they don't want coal mines in the Rocky Mountains?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important to this government to be able to make sure that Albertans have an opportunity to say what they want with the eastern slopes. That's why we did the coal review committee, and the Minister of Energy will have more to say after reviewing that report. Again, the hon. member just wants to distract. Last week \$2.4 billion, I think, invested in northern Alberta . . .

An Hon. Member: Two point five.

Mr. Jason Nixon: It was \$2.5 billion invested in northern Alberta. Dow Chemical is building a new facility inside Fort Saskatchewan. The news is good for Albertans. We're back on track. That member just wants to bet against them. Shame on him.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that we see continued lobbying efforts by coal companies and given that before the coal policy was revoked, the government only talked to Australian billionaires and coal companies and didn't consult with Albertans and given that the government has continuously tried to tell Albertans that nothing had changed and that they had no need to be outraged by what the government was doing and given that because of that, it's impossible to trust the UCP when it comes to coal mining, can the minister promise today that the government will not engage with coal lobbyists while the coal panel is concluding its work? Yes or no?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's really quite surprising that that hon. member has not addressed the issue that when he was in government, he and his cabinet changed the 1976 coal policy – they put it in writing, actually, in a letter – opening the way for coal projects to take place on the eastern slopes, but along came the Minister of Energy, who's having a coal consultation with Albertans to make sure that they get that policy right despite the fact that the NDP changed the policy without talking to anybody.

Homelessness and Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Homelessness has grown by over 1,000 people in Edmonton during the pandemic, now reaching close to 3,000. Many have nowhere to go and have been forced onto the streets. The UCP has let this happen and has made it worse. They closed shelters, refused to work with other governments to build housing, cut AISH and income supports, and budgeted \$50 million less in homeless support this year compared to last. Without support Albertans experiencing homelessness are at extreme risk, and some will die. The government must intervene now. Will the UCP provide immediate support?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Homelessness is a crisis for our community. That's why our government took it seriously. We committed to maintaining \$49 million in our budget. We are working collaboratively with other orders of government, and we're working with the community to come up with new strategies. Stay tuned. We'll be announcing new actions in the coming days and weeks.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that we have called for the UCP to offer stable funding for shelters and given that shelters offer temporary relief but are not a permanent solution – housing is – and agencies should be helping people find a home, not chasing funding to keep shelters open and given that in two years the UCP has continually ignored the city of Edmonton's request to build permanent supportive housing, will the minister commit today to finally work with them and start building these homes immediately?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, just before today's House sitting I had a very good conversation with Mayor Sohi and his administration. We're working together to come up with a new strategy to counter the crisis of homelessness, not only in Edmonton but across the province. Stay tuned. We'll have more to say in the coming days.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP's housing strategy means nothing without funding to actually build affordable housing and given that the UCP's disastrous plan to sell off housing stock is completely opposite to the plans of the municipal and federal governments – the only people happy with the plan seem to be corporate landlords and UCP donors – and given that in two years the UCP has done nothing to build housing and help people, to the Minister of Seniors and Housing: instead of providing profitable housing deals to corporations, will the minister focus on the nearly 3,000 people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is: what did the NDP government do for the last four years? Nothing. The Alberta government is acting on numerous recommendations that have come from the Alberta housing review panel, provided to us in 2020. The assets that are being sold are vacant and underused and are not being used. We are saving the taxpayer hard-working dollars. By selling these units, we will reinvest the proceeds back into affordable housing so that we can better provide it to Albertans.

COVID-19 Response and Health Policies

Mr. Loewen: Albertans are paying the consequence for this Premier's summertime abandonment of the province. Back when the Premier announced the best summer ever, there were 2,336 cases. In a clear attempt to save Canada's least popular Premier's job from a mounting revolt, Albertans were told these numbers supported removing restrictions. Now the Health minister is saying that Alberta won't even consider dropping major COVID restrictions until 2022 regardless of our numbers. To the Premier: does this government have a single independent external criteria for reopening, or should Albertans just expect the decision to come down to this Premier's political survival?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for the question. You know, one of the key mandates that I have is to actually look at contingency planning moving forward, and that looks at: how do we prepare for whatever COVID is going to throw at us? It could be moving into an endemic phase. It could be another delta wave. It could be another wave that perhaps vaccines are not as effective against. I'm working very closely with the professionals in Alberta Health and with AHS to make sure we're ready, we have the capacity to be ready for that, and then we'll be able to announce that in the coming weeks.

Mr. Loewen: Given that lockdowns have real consequences on Alberta families, one of which is Alberta's growing opioid crisis, which has tragically hit 1,026 drug poisoning deaths between January and August this year, officially making 2021 the worst year yet, and given that, to show the magnitude, more people have died of overdose this year than died of COVID last year and given that the average age of death is alarmingly young and this government is spending more on COVID advertising than the entire fight against the opioid crisis, to the Premier: when will your government look not only at COVID but acknowledge and act upon the opioid public emergency?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, one death is one death too many when it comes to opioids. We have a very robust plan, the recovery-oriented system of care, ensuring that people – through the continuum of care, which starts with the supervised consumption sites and goes into detox and treatment and recovery, we help people into a pathway so that they can reunite with their families and live successful and happy lives again.

Thank you.

2:20

Mr. Loewen: Given that if Albertans have to wait for the Premier's popularity to rebound before this government will change its inconsistent and damaging policies, they'll need patience as just today 22 UCP CAs passed a motion requiring a leadership review of Canada's least popular Premier and given that other provinces have rescinded mandates that would leave our hospitals understaffed, with the Superior Court of Ontario going as far as issuing an injunction against these mandates, to the Premier: will this government do the right thing and scrap this policy and put Alberta's health care system before the Premier's desperate cling to power?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I fully appreciate that measures that we have put in place have had a detrimental impact on Albertans. None of this is easy. There are no easy answers, but our change in policy in the fall was absolutely necessary. We put in place the REP program and other measures to protect our health care system and to protect Albertans. That was critically necessary. My role as the Minister of Health is to be able to do contingency planning going forward so we can manage this and limit the negative impacts on as many Albertans as possible.

Physician Recruitment and Retention in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Nearly 100,000 people in Lethbridge, but there are no family doctors accepting new patients, not one. Last week I stood with Kira McLean, who had to drive two hours to Cardston for a 10-minute appointment that should have been a walk-in. I have been hearing from Lethbridge residents for weeks now unable to access a family doctor. I've demanded action; I've heard nothing from the government. So what specific action will the Minister of Health take to ensure the people of Lethbridge can access primary care on a walk-in basis immediately, as in this month, as in this year, not sometime this decade?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has the call.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. I've heard from the hon. member and I've heard from my colleague from Lethbridge and am very

much aware of the concerns about access to family doctors in Lethbridge. Recruitment depends on local partnerships, and I'm pleased to hear that partners in Lethbridge are making progress. AHS and Chinook primary care network are developing a broad recruitment strategy and communication materials in collaboration with the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce, the city of Lethbridge, and Economic Development Lethbridge, and I'm hopeful that they will be successful in attracting more doctors to the area to be able to address these concerns.

Ms Phillips: Given, Mr. Speaker, that recruitment actually depends on a stable environment for doctors to put down roots in a community and given that the only result of the UCP war on doctors has been my constituents losing access to their GP and having to drive hours to get primary care or having to visit the emergency room to deal with things like antibiotics or prescription refills, given that one-third of people in Lethbridge don't have a family doctor, Minister, explain the specific steps you are going to take to make sure that we have access to family doctors on at least a walk-in basis by the end of 2021.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of the local strategy the Chinook PCN medical director and executive director are working with the AHS south zone medical leadership team to improve recruitment and retention of family physicians in the Lethbridge area. AHS directly recruits to sponsored positions for physicians where there are specific identifying needs, and they are currently interviewing applicants for AHS-sponsored positions for the new Lethbridge-based family practitioners. Depending on the outcome, they hope to see new family physicians working in the community very soon. In addition, we gave Chinook PCN the approval to recruit a new nurse practitioner, which we hope will complement services in Lethbridge.

Ms Phillips: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the plan that we've just heard is still going to take too long, the question is simple. For the minister: when will new physicians arrive in Lethbridge? How many? Is there a plan to expand the rural physician program or help AHS hire residents? Simple questions. We are waiting for answers. We need walk-in basis immediately, and then we need a better plan that is more clear on how many physicians, when they will start, when the clinics will open. When will people get access to a family doctor?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I just answered, the teams are working on this right now, sponsored positions for a family-based practitioner, and we've also authorized a new nurse practitioner for the area to be able to get someone as quickly as possible. You know, as the hon. member knows, access to family physicians is a long-standing challenge in Alberta and across Canada. We continue to gain doctors, the quarter overall, but the pandemic has impacted some physician practices. We're continuing to work particularly in rural areas. We've made a commitment to be able to assist, driving more doctors to that, and we'll continue to work to be able to support the health of Albertans.

Hydrogen Strategy

Ms Ganley: The NDP supported the hydrogen industry by funding pilot projects that helped industry to grow and become leaders in hydrogen production. The UCP have finally released their hydrogen road map; sadly, it's a little light on details. It doesn't offer additional supports to industry. Worse, it doesn't even say how they

will achieve the goals beyond existing policies put in place by previous governments. It's nice to see that the UCP have finally accepted our ideas, but how did it take this government over two years to copy and paste other people's work?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it's a little bit rich to hear from the NDP their all of a sudden new-found religion when it comes to the energy sector. This party, the United Conservative Party, we've been behind the energy industry all the way through. That's why we're attracting cutting-edge technology, brand new petrochemical facilities here, net zero, brand new hydrogen investments from Air Products, ATCO, and Suncor. Alberta's energy sector is going to continue to innovate and lead the way forward.

Ms Ganley: Given that the NDP caucus released our hydrogen strategy over a year ago with the goal of exporting hydrogen by 2030 and at the time the associate minister said that it was an impossible timeline and that 2040 was the absolute earliest possibility then last week claimed that no one expected the hydrogen industry to develop so quickly despite the fact that everyone except the UCP expected that, can the associate minister do the mature thing, admit he was wrong, and start taking advice from experts in industry so Alberta doesn't miss further opportunities?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we have a question for the NDP. When will they apologize for their four years of government chasing away energy investment every single year? This government is attracting investment by record amounts. Dow Chemical a couple of weeks ago. Just this last week in northern Alberta a new petrochemical facility: \$2.5 billion. NDP chased away tens of billions. We're attracting it every single week into this province.

Ms Ganley: Given that the question was about hydrogen and the minister hasn't said the word once yet and given that a year ago the associate minister said that we don't have enough water to produce green hydrogen in the province without using bottled water while the UCP simultaneously gave more water to coal-mining companies to strip-mine our Rockies and given that seeing green hydrogen being proposed could produce steel without ripping up the mountains and given the associate minister is suddenly agnostic about the colour of hydrogen, will the associate minister commit here and now that he will listen to industry and investors and actually support green hydrogen?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, you better believe we're listening to investors. That's why they're bringing in their dollars to Alberta, because of the policies this government has put in place. When it comes to hydrogen, look at the Air Products deal. When it comes to hydrogen, ATCO and Suncor have put in a partnership. We're going to continue to lead the way. On top of that, we have our mines and minerals strategy to make sure that we're there servicing the energy needs of the world. That's exactly what this government is going to do. On top of that, the largest solar project in Canadian history is happening right now in Alberta. Amazon Web Services, Shell. It's a good time to be in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has a question to ask.

Foreign Qualification and Credential Recognition

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that we are taking steps to recognize workers' credentials from other provinces here in Alberta, but I think we can do more. A new Canadian in my

constituency is having issues getting her credential recognized as a registered nurse. She is getting the runaround as to why her application was denied even though she passed and meets all the required criteria. I believe the next step in opening Alberta to workers and helping drive our economy is recognizing out-of-country qualifications. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: are we looking into recognizing these workers' skills as part of our economic recovery?

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that member for the question. Immigration has been and will continue to be a vital part of the economy and the social fabric of this province. Through the fairness for newcomers office we're working with our professional regulators to ensure that they operate transparently, objectively, and impartially. That'll ensure that the qualified newcomer professionals are licensed in Canada and can get to work as quickly as possible to help grow the economy.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that workers from outside Canada also have expertise in the fields that Alberta needs and given that we have an increasing number of jobs available without qualified workers that can fill them and given that recognizing foreign credentials has been a long-standing issue for those that immigrate to Alberta from outside the country, to the minister: when can we expect this government will begin to move forward on recognizing foreign credentials the way it is aiming to recognize out-of-province credentials?

2:30

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're taking action to ensure that newcomers can get to work quicker by eliminating barriers to recognizing their foreign credentials and to support our economic recovery and growth. The fairness for newcomers office helps ensure that newcomers can leverage their education and their experience to reach their full potential and help grow the economy. We've ensured that interim registration decisions are made within six months and that final decisions are made within a reasonable time frame.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that it continues to be a problem for employers to find workers, especially in construction, front-line service industry, and restaurants, due to ongoing labour shortages, maybe due to COVID-19, to the same minister: can you inform the House what measures and/or assistance the government is taking to help employers to fill these positions so employers, especially small businesses, are able to have enough workers to continue their operations and to help to grow our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many professionals who come to Alberta, excessive red tape does prevent them from working in their field even when they have been practising for years outside of Alberta. That's why our government introduced the fairness for newcomers action plan – and that included the Fair Registration Practices Act – to eliminate many of the barriers that newcomers have to face when they're seeking employment here in

Alberta. We're also supporting programs that provide low-interest microloans to newcomers to help with expenses related to licensing and certification, and that'll help newcomers leverage their education as well as their experience to reach their full potential and help grow the economy.

Rural High-speed Internet

Mr. Carson: Upon coming into office, the UCP made all sorts of promises about delivering universal high-speed Internet across the province. Now, two and a half years into their mandate, there still isn't a plan, and hundreds of thousands of Albertans still don't have access to high-speed Internet. This lack of progress comes at a time when more Albertans are working and learning from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has only grown the digital divide. Why is this government not making access to high-speed Internet a priority?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the member opposite that for four years when he was in government, his government didn't make this a priority at all. By contrast I'd like to point out the fact that I was able to announce a \$150 million commitment this summer from the province of Alberta towards improving connectivity infrastructure for rural, remote, and Indigenous communities all across this province. The government of Alberta knows that connectivity is extremely important to the future of this province, and we are investing in that future.

Mr. Carson: Given that the government has announced some funding for broadband and given that this funding only amounts to roughly 10 per cent of the total money required to provide universal broadband access according to the government's own estimates and given that there are no details on how to apply for this money or how it will be distributed, which means that as of right now this money is just a novelty cheque being handed out for political gain, to the minister: where is the plan for this money? Is this just more UCP smoke and mirrors?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that we have committed \$150 million. The NDP, in their four years in government, committed zero dollars. I know which side of the House I want to be on. We are making investments in connectivity infrastructure to support those rural, remote, and Indigenous communities that need access to high-quality, reliable Internet. You know what? This is going to take collaboration across all levels of government. We continue to work with municipalities and with the federal government. Unfortunately, there was a bit of a delay with the feds on their election, but we're getting back to work now, and I have more to say soon.

Mr. Carson: Given that when you look through the government's staff directory, there isn't a single person tasked with working on broadband – in fact, any of the staff who were assigned to it have been moved to other roles – and given that this government still doesn't have a plan to deliver high-speed Internet to Albertans, why would the minister move staff off this critical area? How do we help him connect the dots and realize that high-speed rural broadband Internet is absolutely critical to our economic future?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's nice to see for a change that the NDP is taking an interest in connectivity when for four years they did nothing. Let me just say thank you to the hard-working bureaucrats in Service Alberta who are supporting me in implementing this program and bringing this investment forward. This \$150 million investment is the most money spent in over 15

years by the Alberta government. I'm proud to be a part of the government that is leading that investment. We will be continuing to work with the federal government and other levels of government as well as private-sector telecoms and Internet companies. There's going to be so much excitement in this space in the very near future.

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

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been 127 days since we first found out that the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant closed, and still thousands of businesses are still struggling to get their money. When we asked about the delay, the minister asked us to contact his office. Well, Minister, that doesn't work either. My constituency office contacted his office regarding an entertainment company. We got the company through, but now they've waited over 25 days for the payment. To the minister. Now is the time to come clean. Why is this program broken, and how much longer are these businesses going to have to wait?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. Again, as I've mentioned in this Chamber many times, if elected officials have small businesses that have reached out to them, I'm happy to work with them as they work through their applications. We have contacted every single applicant for further information that may be required to process their applications, and we'll continue to work with them to do so.

Also, good news today: this week we will be launching, in response to the restriction exemption program, the \$2,000 of supports to businesses impacted by that program. That's going live this week as well for those businesses.

Mr. Deol: Given that another business online worked with and submitted all the documents the minister's department requested on October 5, one day before the October 6 deadline, but given that this owner is now in a fight with department staff to reverse the decision to close his application because the department didn't have enough staff to see that the documentation arrived on time, to the minister. It's clear that he did not provide enough staffing and resources to deal with the third instalment of SMERG, and his failure has cost a business critical funding. Is he aware of the impact this has on small businesses? To me, it doesn't even look like he cares.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I want to say a huge thank you to all the public servants that worked on this program. Our department actually borrowed staff from many different departments from across government to be able to service the over 120,000 small businesses that applied for support through various relaunch grants to be distributed, over \$700 million to support small businesses across Alberta throughout this pandemic, numerous iterations of that program in addition to other supports, from the tourism levy abatement to many others. We'll continue to be there for small businesses, and we look forward to the rebound going forward.

Mr. Deol: Given that this government does not have respect for taxi drivers, who have been getting Albertans where they need to go throughout the entire pandemic, including grocery stores, medical appointments, and other essential places, and given that the UCP excluded them from any form of support for the first 14 months of COVID-19 and that the taxi drivers I've been working with now to

get the SMERG are being overscrutinized and undercompensated – it's clear that they're being disproportionately flagged for manual review – why is the minister nickel and diming and denying cab drivers the support they deserve?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, there was some noise there, so I didn't fully hear the question, but I do know that we expanded the program to be able to include people that were providing ride-sharing services as well as cab services. We're going to continue to be there to support small businesses across this province as hopefully we can emerge from this pandemic into an endemic phase sooner rather than later. One thing of note, though, for all those small businesses that are out there: Alberta right now is forecasted to lead the whole country in growth this year and next year. We're looking forward to a strong economic rebound. That's going to help small businesses that are leading the way in that growth.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Postsecondary Education and Skills for Jobs

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working to address current and future labour market needs by equipping Albertans with the skills, knowledge, and competencies they need to succeed in their lifelong pursuits. As part of our government's Alberta 2030: building skills for jobs strategy, we have pledged to prioritize the expansion of broadband access to support distance education to reach students where they are. There are many places in my riding where students could not participate in virtual learning last year because of poor digital infrastructure. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what is being done to expand broadband access to rural communities?

2:40

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for the question. It's a great question, an important question, and for all the reasons that the member mentioned, it is so important that we invest today to address the gap in connectivity infrastructure in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities all across this province. That is why I'm so excited to have announced \$150 million in new funding from the government of Alberta to expand that infrastructure and to get that job done. We will continue to work with the government of Canada and other municipalities as well as the private sector, Telus, and Internet providers to make sure we maximize the amount of dollars going towards solving this problem.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort-Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. The Alberta 2030 strategy also pledges to reduce the skills gap by expanding apprenticeships in careers of the future. We aim to become the first province to offer every undergrad student access to work-integrated learning opportunities. To this end, our government is encouraging postsecondary institutions and industry to work together to identify opportunities for new apprenticeship-style programs that respond to labour market needs. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how many new apprenticeship programs will be established in the next school year?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite want to talk about something totally different, but I do want to get to the member's question, and the member has a really important question about the apprenticeship expansion initiative. I'm proud to report that we've recently completed an RFP process and received

approximately 18 submissions to create new apprenticeship programs, and we're evaluating those proposals. I haven't seen them myself yet, but I know that there are some very exciting initiatives there, and this expansion of apprenticeship is a very new opportunity for Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. There are many people who have received their career training from outside of our province or even outside of the country. These could be immigrants or people from Alberta who choose to complete their training elsewhere. These skilled professionals have years of professional experience or training, but when they come to our province, they find that they are unable to be employed in their trades because of their credentials not being recognized. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: advise what work is being done to recognize out-of-province credentials.

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member with the question. Earlier this session we introduced Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, and this bill will make it easier, if passed, for talented and highly skilled Canadian certified workers to bring their expertise to Alberta. By removing barriers to labour mobility and growth, we're improving Alberta's competitive edge, attracting investment that will lead to significant job creation and economic growth, now and in the future.

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

I see the Government House Leader has risen. We are in the middle of Members' Statements, but I'm happy to hear.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm just rising pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) so that the daily Routine can proceed past 3 o'clock.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Investment in Alberta

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, did you know that as a born and raised Albertan, it has been well over a decade since I have heard of, seen, or been touched by so many good-news economic stories in our province? In fact, last week was a banner week for so many reasons, 7 billion, in fact, because that is the amount of new private-sector investment announced last week in our province. Your United Conservative government is diversifying Alberta's economy, and putting politics aside, it is United Conservative economic policies that are attracting investment back to our province and fuelling this growth. Would you like some examples, perhaps?

Amazon Web Services just announced \$4.3 billion in investment as they install Canada's second cloud server hub in Calgary. This follows other massive tech investments from Mphasis, mCloud, RBC innovation hub, the Rogers-Shaw investment, and, of course, Infosys. We finally have global tech giants investing in Alberta.

And UCP policies are directly tied to the growth of our film and television industry. Since the UCP introduced the film and television tax credit last year, nearly a billion dollars of investment has come to our province, including *The Last of Us*, which is the biggest film and television production in Canadian history.

And don't forget our energy industry. It continues to lead the way on ESG measures. The line 3 pipeline is up and running, the new \$2.5 billion northern petrochemical plant in GP, and Shell and Silicon Ranch are installing a huge solar farm. We already have the largest solar project in the country, and we have the most renewable energy projects in all of Canada. Our hydrogen road map will help make Alberta a hydrogen superpower, a global market that will be worth likely somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$2.5 trillion. All of this underscores how your UCP government is attracting investment back to Alberta and diversifying Alberta's economy.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 85, Education Statutes (Students First) Amendment Act, 2021, sponsored by the hon. Minister of Education, and Bill 86, Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, my good friend.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Bill 83 Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 83, being the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2021.

[Motion carried; Bill 83 read a first time]

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Bill 84 Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 84, the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2021.

Alberta's economy is recovering, and Alberta's government remains committed to ensuring that our province is the most attractive place to start and grow a business, attract investment, and create jobs. The focus on attracting and supporting economic investment and private-sector growth is central to Alberta's recovery plan.

Our government has already made some important modernizations to the Business Corporations Act, including addressing the residency requirements for directors and to enable corporations to utilize virtual meetings as well as electronic voting and notifications for meetings. But there was more to do, and following extensive consultations, we have identified more ways that we can solidify Alberta's place at the top of the list for innovators, entrepreneurs, and investors. The amendments before you today set out several important modernizations and regulatory burden reductions in order to enhance Alberta's competitiveness to attract and retain corporations.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 84 read a first time]

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

hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists 2020-2021 annual report and the College of Dietitians of Alberta 2020 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's your favourite time of day. It's Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills

Bill 218 Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries) Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate November 1: Mr. Dang]

The Speaker: On the motion for concurrence are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my hon. colleagues for reminding me of how private members' business proceeds in the Chamber on Monday afternoons, and thanks to my constituents for sending me here today. I'm going to do as I often do, which is that I'm going to start just with a couple of thoughts recognizing the hard work of the front-line health care workers in Lethbridge and thanking them for their service.

2:50

As I start my work here on a Monday, I am acutely aware that there are front-line health care workers all across southern Alberta and indeed all across the province, but for the ones I come here to represent, perhaps there wasn't a start to the work week because there wasn't an end to the work week. They were busy all through the weekend, and they have been working very, very hard to meet the incredible health care needs that have been created by the fourth wave of the pandemic.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to concurrence on this bill, that proposes a fairly simple change to the parks act and to the way that we understand how parks are made and how they're changed and how their status in the first place is arrived at in the statute and then how it is subsequently changed after there has been a park designation. Now, parks' designations are a matter that comes before cabinet. They are a matter that can be decided through order in council, through the regional plans and other pieces of legislation. There are consultation periods and so on. Certainly, when it comes to the disestablishment of a park, this is something that is a very rare occasion in the government of Alberta, and it is something that's done after a period of consultation. Certainly, that is usually some level of Indigenous consultation, but then there's some local consultation in public of various kinds as well provided for.

Now, what this bill provides is that the process for disestablishment or change of a park's designation needs to come before this House before it can move through. Certainly, we see in some other jurisdictions that these are matters that are legislative rather than regulatory, so it's not really offside of other parks regimes in that way, in fact, and wouldn't necessarily affect the public consultation or other consultation pieces that are either in regional planning or within the parks act itself.

Now, the reason why this legislation should be debated on the floor of this House – I mean, first of all, it's not lost on me that we

are trying to have a debate on the floor of the House, the fact that a piece of legislation proposes that we have a debate on the floor of the House. It's not lost on me, Madam Speaker, that the reason that we're doing that is because of trust. So let's take the first piece that we are having to debate, concurrence; that is to say, to hear this piece of legislation in this House and then provide an opportunity for members to either provide comment, amendment, and then certainly provide back to our constituents a record of our support or opposition, as the case may be, to this and then that the fundamentally representational and also accountability function of our jobs is undertaken.

The first thing that's troubling, of course – and I say this every time when I rise to speak to concurrence, and it hasn't changed, so I'm just going to keep saying it – is that this whole business of having to speak to concurrence is fundamentally misplaced and incorrect in the first place. The fact is that this new system of private members having to go through this circuitous route to have their private members' business debated on the floor, with their only chance of a private member's bill being frustrated by this process and having this committee decide what comes to the floor and what not, is too bad. Every single time I speak to concurrence, I am registering the fact that I deplore this new system, and I don't believe it affords private members, regardless of the caucus that they sit in in the House, the opportunity to do their business as a private member in the way that it has historically been intended and been structured.

We bring ourselves to the reason why we believe that it's important to debate this piece of legislation here in this Chamber, Madam Speaker. The reason that I indicated that we've brought this forward in the first place, or that my hon. colleague has, is because before the pandemic hit, it was the parks signs that bubbled up all over Calgary, in particular starting in Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Acadia. Then a couple of weeks later they started popping up like mushrooms all over Lethbridge, and they are still there.

They have been joined by the anticoal signs, the protect our water signs, the signs indicating support for the K to 12 education system, signs opposing cuts to our university and college, signs opposing the mismanagement of health care, generalized signs expressing support for public-sector workers and public services more generally. This has become the way that people are making themselves heard in a time of COVID-19, when protests or other ways that normally citizens might have themselves heard have been somewhat changed, obviously, due to the conditions of the novel coronavirus.

Now, people found a way to be heard when they could not be heard otherwise, and that's why we need to make sure that they are further heard on this matter of parks, which is sort of, I guess, one of the granddaddies of the issue-based signs, what I call the opinion signs, around the province. It was the first instance where Albertans said: "Uh-uh-uh. No, we do not trust the intentions of this government. We do not trust what is happening with these changes to the parks act." It is the response to that outpouring of support and certainly the messages that Albertans were trying to send through to their government, that appeared to be not listening, that was the impetus behind this bill in the first place. That's why it needs to be heard, Madam Speaker. That's why it was brought forward in the first place, and that's why it is the right thing for it to be heard.

The vast majority of Albertans shared the view that the government's proposals around changes to parks' designations were not necessarily changes that were supported by the vast majority of Albertans, but Albertans expressed at that time a lack of trust in government. What this bill will allow us to do, if it should be heard on the floor of this House – and, certainly, any members

may propose amendments or otherwise improve the legislation. Certainly, many of their constituents would be happy for a fulsome debate on this if the precise way that it has been proposed to the House does not contravene them or if they see improvements to it. That's the whole point of bringing a piece of legislation to this House, where we can, in some cases, even work together on improving a piece of legislation, reflecting the views both of our backgrounds but also our representational duties as MLAs.

Now, we know that Albertans were so concerned about this potential threat to roll back our conservation efforts that we enjoy from parks because Albertans are proud of our conservation legacy in this province. They are proud of when Peter Lougheed established Kananaskis 40-some-odd years ago now. They were proud when our government expanded a number of protected areas up north, leading to the world's largest contiguous boreal forest protected area. Let me just underline that: in the world. Madam Speaker, these are very important initiatives, and Albertans are proud of them.

Albertans also know that climate change is real, and nature-based solutions are part of mitigating and adapting to climate change. They are about avoiding erosion using the water-absorption natural capacity of undisturbed landscapes. They're about protecting forests and biodiversity, which is key to functional ecosystems. We know that grassland conservation is extremely urgent, that soil capture of carbon, that water absorption capacity allow us to adapt to more frequent and severe weather events. Conservation and biodiversity are key to our response to climate change. Albertans know about, too, and value the recreation infrastructure, which is why over the period of 2015 to '19 we put \$250 million into the parks system.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on the motion for concurrence on 218? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to rise today – it's always an honour to rise in this House – to speak to the issues of the day and to the bills of the day, especially as a private member, to be able to come into this House and to speak to the business of the private members. For those that may be out in the real world, the hard-working Albertans of this province, maybe they don't understand that there's a difference between government bills and private members' bills. This is the opportunity that private members have to be able to address bills that are coming from people that are not necessarily in the government. Matter of fact, they cannot be from the government. They can only be from those representatives that are private members. It's always a pleasure to be able to stand up and speak, and today it's a pleasure to be able to stand up and speak to Bill 218.

3:00

Again, for those that are maybe outside of this Chamber, maybe they don't understand the process. When a good idea for a bill is brought forward by a private member, they do a lot of work to meet with stakeholders. They do a lot of work to talk with individuals that are knowledgeable on the issue that the bill is going to present. Then they work with Parliamentary Counsel to get the language, and they draft the bill. And then that bill is brought before the Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills Committee. That's the committee that vets all private members' bills. Every bill that is a private member's bill has to go before this committee, and they have to explain to the committee the benefits of this bill. The committee gets the opportunity to query just, you know, who they talked to and what the intent of this bill is and whether or not this bill has the capacity to be able to bring benefit to the people of

Alberta. Today I rise to speak in support of the Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills Committee recommendation that Bill 218 proceed to a second reading.

The Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills Committee listens to the private member, listens to the idea of that bill, looks at the language of that bill, and then they will make a recommendation to this House, a recommendation that we call concurrence, that they agree with that bill, and they believe that it should move forward to second reading. They have a vote of concurrence, and if not, then that bill comes forward, and the House gets to decide for themselves whether they believe that bill, that private member's bill, should move forward.

The committee that looked at Bill 218 – Bill 218 is called the Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries) Amendment Act, 2021. This was brought before the committee. They have voted unanimously to move that this bill move forward into the House to be read a second time and perhaps go to the Committee of the Whole and eventually, perhaps, become an actual law in this province. This is in line with the traditions that we have in this House, with the procedures that we have in this House. It would give the members of this House, the people's elected representatives, the 87 or so of us in this House that have the opportunity to be able to help make legislation across this province, a chance to debate this bill at second reading.

Now, I must admit, Madam Speaker, that I'm a little confused as to actually why we're debating a unanimous recommendation for concurrence. The committee that looked at this unanimously recommended that this move forward. I know that some on the opposite side of these benches here would point to a concurrence debate that was held on Bill 212, that we did have that debate on. While that is true, I believe that at the time they said that it was a waste of time to have that debate on concurrence. Why would you have a concurrence debate on Bill 212? It's a waste of time. However, that was not a unanimous recommendation from the committee for concurrence. And because it wasn't a unanimous recommendation, it was wise to bring it before the House and to let all private members hear the arguments, both the pro and con, for moving forward with the bill and then moving it forward as seen fit by the Legislature. The committee wanted the members of this House to have that opportunity on Bill 212, to debate on the recommendations for concurrence.

The two situations here between Bill 212 and Bill 218 are quite different. Frankly, Madam Speaker, it's a little puzzling to try to understand what we're actually doing here. We could be dealing with other business in the House. We could be dealing with other business on the Order Paper. We could be getting other things done that would be moving forward pieces of legislation that would be, if this House decides, in the best interest of the people of Alberta; instead, we're debating a concurrence that had bipartisan, unanimous support.

It makes you wonder why the Official Opposition wanted a concurrence debate at all. You know, I guess we could bring forward all sorts of different thoughts and reasons for why it seems to be important to have a debate on something that's been given unanimous, bipartisan support, but, you know, I've never tried to make the claim that I understand the socialist mindset, and I'm not going to today, so I guess we'll have that debate. It seems a little redundant since representatives from both sides of the House that sit on the Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills Committee unanimously agreed that we should move forward in progress with this bill.

I support the committee's recommendation for concurrence. I believe that the committee reviewed the bill, that they gave it a sufficiently thorough investigation as to whether or not the bill had

any obvious flaws to it or any obvious concerns that may stop concurrence or unanimous agreement to it. I believe that the democratic process is important and that bills on such important topics as this should be debated by the people's representatives. And, you know, when we take a look at this piece of proposed legislation, we can see that it's talking about consultation when it comes to our parks. It's talking about the time periods that will be held for consultation, and within 30 days of tabling the report that comes out of this, the Legislative Assembly would pass a resolution adopting the report to deal with things that amend the park order, like decreasing the area of a park or recreation area or to vary the prescribed class of a park or a recreation area.

These are issues that are worthy of discussion in this House, and it'll be the House, as we go through debate, that will make the decision as to whether or not this bill is worthy of support. But at the end of the day this is a debate on concurrence. We've all agreed at the committee level, and it seems a little bit redundant for us to be talking about it today.

Having said that, I would encourage my colleagues to vote in favour of concurrence, because that was the recommendation of the committee, and it would allow us to move on to other important business in this House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 218, Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries) Amendment Act, 2021, and, you know, to speak in support of the committee's recommendation for the bill to proceed.

Madam Speaker, it's kind of interesting to hear the member opposite stand up for probably the last 10-ish minutes and talk about democracy, socialist mindsets, things like that, and continuously question why we're here talking about this. I would suggest the member could have spent some of that time actually talking about the bill and what is it in the bill that he supports and what is it in the bill that he thinks would, you know, advance the well-being of Albertans. He chose not to do that, so I will.

I'd like to talk a little bit about why I do support this and what this bill aims to do. I'm going to give a little bit of the bill background. Bill 218, if passed, would require some very detailed consultation. You know, I think this is a really inspired piece of legislation, and it's inspired, really, by the absolute failure of this government to do some of the very basic things that they're required to do, and that is to listen to Albertans before making some huge changes in this province, to slow down and ask Albertans what it is they want, and then listen to their response.

What this bill aims to do is to fill in some of the holes or to actually underline for this government how to do consultation, how to do it properly, and this legislation sort of bakes it in so that there aren't any more questions and, hopefully, this government would use this legislation to do a better job going forward.

3:10

I think that we can all recall, going back a little bit now, about what happened around parks and natural land in 2020. I just quickly checked into – I know the Member for Lethbridge-West talked about the Defend Alberta Parks signs, and, of course, if you live in any town, city, or village, you probably have seen these signs. They're pretty much everywhere. I have been to a lot of small communities, a lot of large communities, and they're pretty much everywhere. That says a lot. And this isn't an issue that is contained to large urban centres, as the government will often sort of note.

This is everywhere. These are Albertans that live all over the province that are saying: we are not okay with what went on here.

In their timeline – if you go to Defend Alberta Parks, to their website – it gives you a bit of a timeline about what happened. We know that in March of 2020 the Alberta government announced a plan to close and remove parks. They called that plan optimizing – and I'm saying that with scare quotes – Alberta parks. Essentially, that was to close 20 parks and remove 164 of them from the Alberta parks system.

Now, I think back to that time, Madam Speaker, as we started to understand the full impact of what this government was proposing, and we started to be more and more concerned by what was coming. One of the things I'm going to relate specifically to the area that I represent, and that is St. Albert. This particular natural land is – I think it's in the other riding – actually in Sturgeon county, but it's called Riverlot 56, and I know that I've spoken at length about what Riverlot 56 is. At the time, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar actually came out to St. Albert to join me . . .

An Hon. Member: Oh, a field trip.

Ms Renaud: Yes, it was a field trip.

. . . and we had some other friends out to talk about the importance of the land and why people from those communities – from Sturgeon county, from St. Albert, and even from the northern part of north Edmonton – were very concerned that for this particular natural area the future was uncertain.

What was really funny about that was, at the time, the government said – I can remember the minister of the environment standing up and just saying again and again, “No, we're not doing anything; really, they're just on this list,” for whatever reason that he said, which didn't really make sense to anyone. Why single out these areas and put them on a list if you really have no plans to do anything differently with them? Of course, we never did get any answers to those questions. But, in any event, Riverlot 56 was one of the natural areas that was on that list for different treatment.

Now, I wrote letters from my office to the minister at the time asking what the plan was and did not hear back. I asked the minister at the time why he had not consulted with the group that had undertaken the stewardship of that particular piece of land, that natural land, for decades. They had been doing it I believe since the '80s as a volunteer group, had done the work, and the minister said that Riverlot 56 was on a list because there was nobody in place to take care of it; it needed a better plan. Of course, you can imagine that the minister never responded when I asked: “Well, why didn't you contact the Riverlot 56 steward group? That's literally the name of the group. Why wouldn't you contact them, talk to them about what's going on there?” Of course – you can imagine – no answer. This government doesn't like to admit when they make mistakes, and they certainly don't like to fix them. That was a problem with Riverlot 56, and that was just one of the pieces of land that were on that list for who knows what kind of treatment by this government.

We have learned the hard way, all of us, not just in this Chamber but Albertans, that it is very difficult to trust this government because they are factually incorrect a lot of the time, they like to mislead, they certainly do like to gaslight, and it is very, very difficult to trust what the governments says. Going back to my original comment, that's why I think this piece of legislation is so important, that you force consultation, that you define what it looks like.

Going back to the website of Defend Alberta Parks, we then move to November of 2020, where changes to park legislation were announced. In a new approach to parks and public land management we had the provincial government preparing four

major changes to parks and public land legislation. That was right around the time that the campaign ratcheted up. We saw more and more signs; we saw more and more petitions; we saw very prominent people stepping forward and really talking about why this was so dangerous, to go down this path.

In December 2020 we had optimizing Alberta parks sites stay open and protected, and that's where we started to see the effect of public pressure, that Albertans' voices were heard. The optimizing Alberta parks plan was reversed, and no parks were removed from the Alberta park system in 2020. That was because of Albertans, Madam Speaker.

In 2021, again, changes to the legislation are expected, and – you know what? – this will hopefully answer a lot questions, but we will wait for more details. Usually what we hear is “stay tuned.” Trust me, we are very in tune and staying tuned and will wait to hear what happens.

Going back to the legislation, what I particularly liked about this legislation was that it required a consultation to follow a couple of things, to do a few things without question. This is a consultation process that the government, whichever government, would be required to share notice of the consultation with interested persons at least seven days prior to the start of consultations. Now, I'm not saying that this is something that the government has continuously failed to do, but they have certainly failed on a number of occasions to let people know when consultations are happening. I have no idea why that is, Madam Speaker, if it's just sheer incompetence or it's a lack of planning or it's an unwillingness to hear voices from different places with different ideas. I don't know.

This legislation would lock in some rules. The consultation must last for a period of at least 60 days during which time the government has to publish the proposed changes on a publicly accessible website – I think that's very important – to provide the opportunity for the public to provide written submissions. Now, a consultation for 60 days is, I think, a really good amount. I think that over the last couple of years – and I'm not saying that all consultations or all questions that are asked to the Alberta public have to be open for this amount of time. Perhaps there are simpler ones that can have a shorter period, but I think something this important should at least be given the time for every Albertan who wants to participate to participate.

Sadly, I have seen far too many examples of this government wanting to, like, rush through changes that they have on their agenda. They want to give themselves a little rubber stamp, “Oh, hey, look at us; we consulted,” and it's, like, a week turnaround where people don't even know that it's happening, and it's over. We've seen that again and again. A recent example, even, was – they even do it with jobs, Madam Speaker. Last time, you know, they got rid of the disability advocate that had been there for a couple of years, the inaugural advocate doing that work to set that office up. Got rid of him. They decided to give I think it was a week for people to apply. With a bit of pressure from the opposition, thankfully, they changed that, extended it. That's just more evidence that this government needs some rules about how to actually consult, how to actually ask questions to Albertans, and how to actually give them enough time to answer.

The other thing that I really quite like is that within 14 days of the last day of the consultation period the government has to publish a document summarizing the submissions.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to add my voice to this debate on the concurrence

motion for Bill 218, the Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries) Amendment Act, 2021. Certainly, I would encourage my colleagues all to vote in favour of the concurrence motion because this bill deserves time to be debated in the House. Certainly, this private member's bill is needed. That has been demonstrated significantly by what has happened since the UCP became government in 2019.

Certainly, there are folks far more educated, understanding about concerns in our parks than myself. There is one group that I did want to refer to, which is the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. This organization works to – their mission, really, is to safeguard, connect, and expand parks and wilderness through education, engagement, and collaboration. Certainly, there are different chapters here in Alberta. There's a southern Alberta chapter, a northern Alberta chapter. But, of course, their passion, their concern, their mission is to protect parks. This is not just a provincial organization, but it's actually a national organization.

One of the things that they do just to really, I guess, give some very clear feedback to governments who are making decisions about what lands need to be protected, how lands are used is to actually sort of rate them in a report card type fashion. Just recently their rating came out, and sadly we failed here in Alberta under the UCP government. We got an F. I don't think we can do any worse than that. This is an organization that is very learned about understanding what we need to do to protect our parks and wilderness, and Alberta has certainly done very poorly according to them. They identify various things that the UCP government has done since being elected in 2019.

3:20

For example, we all know that in 2020 175 provincial parks, through the optimizing Alberta parks process, were going to be removed from protected area status. Of course, we know that this was only sort of backtracked on by the UCP government because there was a huge public outcry, a really massive one. Certainly, in my riding there are still a lot of signs up talking about protecting Alberta parks. Thankfully, in this case the UCP did listen, and they did pull back from that, but we still are in a pretty unclear situation regarding: how? What is the plan? What are the policies of the UCP regarding our protected areas, regarding our provincial parks? It's not like we're out of the woods yet.

Certainly, this organization, which has a depth of understanding of these matters, is very concerned about Alberta, because they gave them an extremely low grade. I don't think there is – I don't know. Is there an F minus? I'm not sure, but F is certainly a condemnation of the UCP's decisions in this area.

You know, they talk about other things, too, about how just in 2020 Alberta revoked its 1976 coal policy, opening up sensitive areas of the eastern slopes to coal exploration and mining. Again that was gone back on because of some of the public pressure.

So Alberta doesn't look very good, certainly, in this national report card position, and I think it is something that the UCP should take very seriously. I think that this private member's bill that we're looking at, Bill 218, would go a long way to actually addressing some of the issues that this organization . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a.1), which provides up to five minutes for the mover to close debate, I would like to invite the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to close debate on the motion to concur in the committee report on Bill 218.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd certainly like to thank the member opposite for bringing this bill forward, Bill 218, the Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries)

Amendment Act, 2021. Certainly, as the former chair of the committee there was certainly very good discussion. There certainly was unanimous – as my good friend behind me had indicated, there was unanimous support from the committee for the bill, so certainly perplexed why there is a bit of a delay in not wanting to have the bill discussed further, especially when it comes to second and third reading and however the bill is going to proceed through the House.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the members for their comments and their support, and I hope that collaboratively and without delaying time for private members in the future, we can continue forward and support private members' business.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

3:40

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Nielsen	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Nixon, Jeremy	Schmidt
Ellis	Orr	Schow
Glubish	Pancholi	Schweitzer
Guthrie	Panda	Shandro
Hanson	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Irwin	Rehn	Sigurdson, R.J.
Issik	Reid	Smith
LaGrange	Renaud	Turton
Lovely	Rosin	Williams
Luan	Rowswell	Yao
Madu	Rutherford	Yaseen
Neudorf		

Totals: For – 37 Against – 0

[Motion for concurrence carried unanimously]

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

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent from the Assembly to waive Standing Order 8 and Standing Order 9(1) and proceed immediately to third reading on Bill 207, Reservists' Recognition Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 207 Reservists' Recognition Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 207 in third reading, the Reservists' Recognition Act. As I have stated repeatedly, reservists play an important role in supporting the various operations of Canada's military.

This past Thursday we had the opportunity to reflect on the importance of Canada's military as we remembered the brave men and women who fought for our freedoms. Remembrance Day is not

only a time to remember those who died fighting for the freedoms and peace that we enjoy today; it also serves as a day of thanks and gratitude to those in uniform, both past and present, that serve selflessly in the defence of our great nation.

It was an honour to attend a ceremony at the Kingsway cenotaph last Thursday as the military liaison for the government of Alberta and also, earlier in that week, Madam Speaker, to speak at and host the Indigenous Veterans Day ceremony here at the Legislature, where Mr. Wally Sinclair came as our guest of honour as well as the Lieutenant Governor to speak and to share his thoughts on what that day meant for him and his own experiences as well. Thank you to everybody who came and attended that on just the front steps of the Legislature here.

When I was at the Kingsway Legion on Remembrance Day, it is always moving to hear the speeches and also the poems and prayers that go with it. It is also moving to look out into the audience and see the many people who gather to remember: people of all ages, all walks of life, people who served, people who had family members who served, and people who are just there to pay their respects to all those in the Canadian military. It is always touching to see that. I'm sure many members of this Chamber were attending ceremonies in their constituencies as well, and thank you for attending those.

The members of our Canadian Armed Forces: they're an immensely proud group of people who do a tremendous amount of work and have a lot of dedication and sacrifice for this country, and I have always found, as I've travelled this province and spoken to many serving members and veterans, that they're very proud of the reception that they get in Alberta. It is a very welcoming province to our military community, so everybody should know that. I think one of the goals, of course, is to try to make sure that Alberta remains a leader in doing that, in making sure that the members, the serving members, the families, and the veterans all know that Alberta is very proud of them and very thankful to them.

I had the honour of laying a wreath on behalf of the government of Alberta on Remembrance Day, and it's always a reminder, when you get up to the cenotaph, to take a moment just to remember everybody who has made the ultimate sacrifice to fight for the freedoms that we all have. That number stands as high as about 118,000 Canadians who have made that ultimate sacrifice, Madam Speaker.

From the reservists, of course, then comes the air force, navy, army, and everyone else that's part of the Canadian Forces. Canada is blessed to have such a remarkable group of people fighting on its behalf, and that is why I am proud to have been afforded the opportunity to bring forward a piece of legislation that thanks a segment of our military by making their ability to serve a little bit easier.

In Canada there are just under 30,000 reservists in total between the navy, army, and air force, which makes up about a third of Canada's military total. Specifically in Alberta, Madam Speaker, we have about 2,300 reservists split between the three divisions that I mentioned, including the cadets, which I've talked about before as something that I should have taken part in. I think it would have been a fantastic experience, but I'll make sure to encourage my children to do it. I think they will benefit from it.

This bill, I believe, will have a positive impact on those reservists as well through reducing the period of employment to 12 weeks from 26, and the reservists can have the opportunity to utilize their skills faster when they are called upon. It is imperative to reduce those barriers to get the assistance that is needed.

While I'm thrilled to see that the House accepted that amendment, it's also important to recognize other parts of this bill, of course, and that is the recognition and the thank you to the

reservists, which would be held on the last Saturday of September, which will serve as the recognition for reservists day, and that will line up with national initiatives that already exist.

Part of our job, of course, is to speak on behalf of the people that we represent and to highlight this important work that is going on in our communities and all those folks that have served this country, and I think that both sides of the House have done a good job of shining a light on the importance of the reservists to the military and the importance of the military as a whole.

Given that the government of Alberta is the largest employer of reservists, this is evidence of how much our province values the skills, leadership, and devotion to community that make reservist members so valuable to our society. Of course, I could continue on about that, but part of this bill is to highlight the unique skill set of reservists and what they bring to employers and to try to help show to both the public-sector employers and private sector the unique skill sets of reservists in leadership, in teamwork, in dedication, and that that training that they receive from the Canadian Armed Forces can be utilized in their organizations.

There is a trade-off. There will be time away training. There will be time away on deployments. But that trade-off should come back in full and then some based on the person that you are getting in your organization, and I think that that's something that I want recognized and really highlighted, the overall benefit to an employer hiring a reservist and supporting them. Not only is it a benefit to the province, because reservists, of course, have in times of need responded to crises in this province, the Fort McMurray fires, the Calgary floods being some of them, but we'll see those kinds of deployments across the country. It's a testament to their hard work and dedication not only to Albertans but Canadians and to fighting for us abroad.

You know, one of the things that the government has also done that I think is important is the Alex Decoteau award of honour. Now, I brought this up at the Indigenous Veterans Day ceremony on Monday to highlight that award, that was brought forward by the Minister of Advanced Education, to really just speak to what that meant to our current serving members and their families and to highlight the fact that when I joined the Edmonton Police Service, Alex Decoteau was one of the first officers that I learned about. He was the first Indigenous officer in the Edmonton Police Service. He was an extremely gifted athlete and also served in the First World War and was killed by a German sniper, I believe, on October 30, 1917, in Passchendaele if I have that correct off the top of my head.

In learning about the Edmonton Police Service's history within our own history here in the province, we can really learn the stories of what people sacrificed. You can think of a promising future for somebody like Alex Decoteau, being a police officer, being an extremely gifted athlete, stepping up at a time of need and crisis and paying the ultimate sacrifice. Of course, we need to say thank you to the people who have done that and to recognize those efforts, and the Alex Decoteau award of honour is one way to do that.

3:50

I know that the government has pursued other grant funding for PTSD treatment. The 3MDR was recently, I think, highlighted in a CTV article, where they talked about the benefits of this and the collaboration amongst other countries and universities on this treatment, and I'd be happy to table that article at another time. The government has provided funding and grant funding for that research, which is going to be so important because we know that it's not just enough to say thank you. We also know that there can be physical and mental injuries from deployment, from training, and from being overseas. We need to be able to look after these folks.

I was given the opportunity to observe one treatment actually with 3MDR, and it was very powerful to watch. I thank the individual who was receiving the therapy treatment and allowed what was basically a stranger to sit in the room and to observe it. It really solidified for me the need to get additional supports for that as well. I'm happy that the government responded with supporting HIMARC.

There have been a number of other initiatives to support our veterans and our current serving members and their families as well, but as I sort of get closer to the 10-minute mark here, I won't have time to highlight them all but to just go over some of them, the ways the province has stepped up to say thank you and to provide supports.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 207? Seeing the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak to private member's Bill 207, Reservists' Recognition Act. It's a special privilege to be able to stand today in light of just the opportunity to have been home for constituency week last week and to celebrate and remember Remembrance Day with many of our veterans.

Last Thursday I had the opportunity to celebrate three services in the Crownsnest Pass: one in Blairmore, one in Bellevue, and one at Coleman, which is Legion branch 9. I believe it's actually the oldest legion in the province, and I was told the reason it's not branch 1 is that they wanted to be branch 9 to commemorate and honour the nine individuals that helped found that legion in Coleman.

The reason I bring that up is actually that I was able to sit at a table with a young man named Travis and his wife, Skye. We met for the first time on Thursday. Travis got his career in the military started by serving as a reservist. He then went on to enlist and served a tour of duty in Afghanistan. It was an amazing time to be able to sit with him before the service and hear a little bit about his story and how important Remembrance Day is for him as a veteran.

I think to stand and talk about the Reservists' Recognition Act today and talk about how important it is for us to commemorate that day for those that serve as reservists is important. Again, I want to thank the hon. member and all those that worked to put this legislation together and bring it before us in the Assembly. I do truly have the deepest respect for those that serve as members of our military, whether the reservists or on active duty.

Madam Speaker, it's come to my attention that Alberta is home to over 2,300 reservists, and these brave men and women play a huge role in our society in many ways on top of their service to the military. The majority of our reservists, of course, are gainfully employed and hold jobs or they're enrolled in postsecondary studies, but they still find time to serve in our great province through their volunteer work. This was on display here in the province both during the Fort McMurray fires and the Slave Lake forest fires as well as many other tragic events in our province. These individuals were certainly the first in line to help in any way they could.

I also want to highlight that the date chosen for Reservists' Recognition Day correlates to the reserves' open house. The open house is an opportunity for people to visit the facilities, to learn exactly what it is that reservists do, and it also allows people to learn how to get involved if they wish to do so.

Madam Speaker, I'm very proud of the fact that right here in Edmonton the University of Alberta has many different programs and awards in place to help and to benefit those who serve as our

reservists. One in particular is the Heroes in Mind, Advocacy and Research Consortium, which recently was awarded \$362,000. This money is going towards developing web-based resources to build resilience among our first responders such as military members, law enforcement, and other emergency service individuals. This expanded clinical trial will treat posttraumatic stress disorder.

The U of A has also received \$200,000 in grant money to collaborate with Heroes in Mind to better equip military members, veterans, and public safety personnel to implement resilience-building skills. This program will have different core modules for each specific group, whether they be police officers, military, first responders, et cetera. They will be using advanced technologies to maximize engagement and implement the uptake of their material.

While these programs are great, this government strongly believes that there's still more that we can do for our reservists. These are some of the most honourable people you will ever find, and they deserve support from all of us in any way we can give it. Madam Speaker, one way I believe we can help is by lowering the number of weeks an individual has to work before they are eligible for reservist leave. As it stands right now, it's set at 24 weeks before they are eligible, but we hope to lower this down to 12 weeks. Whether it be that these brave men and women are deployed or require training, we want to make sure they are able to do so, both in order to keep us safe and to ensure that they are able to keep their jobs.

Reservist leave is extremely important as it allows our military members to take time off work without pay and without the risk of losing their employment. Employers must grant reservist leave to eligible employees and guarantee them the same or equivalent job once they return. Employees on reservist leave are considered to be continuously employed for the purpose of calculating their years of service. Reservist leave is a great thing and one that our military members certainly deserve. Many of these individuals have families that they provide for, and this helps. With that being said, it doesn't mean that it's perfect, and that's why we hope to cut the required 24 consecutive weeks' employment down to just 12.

Madam Speaker, while we are looking at recognizing our reservists and making changes to help benefit them, it's important that we also make sure to take the time to recognize them on specific dates. We know that we just celebrated Veterans' Week this last week from November 5 to 11 as well as Remembrance Day itself on November 11, in which we honour all those who have served, both past and present.

There are other days that are not as widely known or celebrated but still deserve our attention. One is Canadian Armed Forces Day, which is celebrated annually on the first Sunday of June. This date was established in April 2002 and is a date on which we celebrate Canada's armed services, their heritage, and their personnel.

Another is the Month of the Military Child, which is celebrated every April. It is meant to both show and recognize the important role that military children play in the Armed Forces community. While we all recognize and respect our military members, we often forget the sacrifices the families of these individuals are forced to make. These children also show great courage and deserve our admiration and our utmost respect. One simple way we can do this is to wear purple on purple day, which takes place annually on April 15.

Madam Speaker, being able to speak here with my colleagues in regard to Reservists' Recognition Act is a major honour for myself. Again, I have the deepest respect for our military members, and I know the same goes for those sitting here in the Chamber with me today. I would like to thank again the hon. member and all those that worked so hard to put this bill together, and I do encourage all

members of this House to vote in favour of private member's Bill 207.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 207? Seeing the hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in support of Bill 207, and I'd like to take this opportunity again to thank my colleague and friend the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont for doing the work to bring this forward, particularly in his role as military liaison. I appreciate the work that he's done to highlight the great work of these men and women who serve our communities.

I have a history in my family of military men and women in service, both active service and reservist service. Even here in the province of Alberta I have a cousin who's in the reserves, and I have learned so much from talking to him about the sacrifices that are made, the time commitment, and even the way that reservists support other critical initiatives across the province, things like emergency response and crisis. I believe the Fort McMurray fires and the floods in Calgary in 2013 were assisted by reservists.

4:00

I just wanted to say thank you to reservists across the province and, quite frankly, across the country for the work that they do. I know that part of the work on this bill had to do with taking the leave time down from 26 weeks to 12 weeks to allow reservists to go on leave more quickly from their jobs. I think that's a really important addition and amendment to the bill as we look to supporting reservists in the work that they do and the training that they are required to have in order to serve our great province and, in fact, our great country.

I, too, had the honour and the pleasure of serving alongside family members in multiple Remembrance Day services over the last several years, and I can't tell you how important that is, to honour and remember our veterans. I think about those that are often forgotten in the process, those that are the unseen, quiet, behind-the-scenes heroes, those in the reserves that are there to serve in crisis at a moment's notice. They often put in a lot of time and training, a lot of volunteer time, time on the weekends, time away from friends and family. They're our moms and dads, brothers and sisters, neighbours and friends, and I'm just so grateful for the work that our reservists do here in the province.

I also wanted to talk a little bit about some of the other initiatives. Most of our reservists, I think, are working full time in the private sector in civilian jobs, or else they're in postsecondary studies. I wanted to thank again the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for some of his work around supporting veterans and supporting reservists in integrating into society and, for some of them that have struggled with PTSD, ways to retrain to re-enter the workforce. I'm really grateful for the work that's been done by this government in supporting and recognizing the great work of these men and women and the role that they play not only in a crisis but also in everyday life. We take for granted that when we need them, they'll be there, and I'm so grateful to know that they are, in fact, there and training actively and ready for duty on a moment's notice. [interjection] I see the hon. member has risen with an intervention.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies. There are no interventions on private members' business.

Mrs. Allard: Oh. No interventions on private members' business. Okay. I was excited to hear it. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Anyway, as I was saying, I just wanted to thank my colleague for bringing this bill forward. I think it's an important piece of legislation to elevate the role that reservists play in our society and the safety of our society and the ability to have that capacity, when needed, to respond to emergencies, both here and abroad.

I was thinking about the history even in my family, all the way back to World War I. I have a great-, great-, I think, great-uncle that passed away. My grandfather's uncle passed away at Passchendaele in Flanders fields, and it's been a story passed down for generations in our family. Although I never got to meet him, it's certainly a source of pride for our family that we have sacrificed in the name of freedom.

If I think about our world today and all the challenges before us, one of the things that I think we can all agree on in this House and in this province is that we here in Alberta really value our freedom. I'm so grateful for the men and women who have literally laid their lives on the line for our freedoms, so grateful for them in the past and certainly in the present.

I don't have a lot more to say about the bill. I think I was speaking in private members' business a couple of weeks ago and got interrupted by the time cut-off, but that's pretty much all I had to say, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to thank again the Member for Leduc-Beaumont and send a heartfelt thank you to all the reservists across the province for the critical work that you do and the way that you are willing to step up on a moment's notice to support.

I am happy to support Bill 207, the Reservists' Recognition Act. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to add some final thoughts here to our discussion around Bill 207, the Reservists' Recognition Act, a bill that I certainly can put my full support behind. Of course, I do thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for bringing this bill forward to be able to recognize our reservists here in the province.

You know, I guess, just listening to people, I think about my own family and their military history as well. My grandfather on my mother's side served very proudly in both world wars, both as a combat soldier as well as a prison guard for prisoners of war. Both of my parents also were active air force members and, I guess, decided before I came on the scene that they would maybe leave that part of their life behind, assuming that I was going to cause great difficulties for them after that. So there's definitely a history of military, and I certainly was kind of headed down that road before I made some other choices.

You know, given the timing of this bill, it having just been Remembrance Day, getting a chance to pass this, I think, is a very good thing. Like the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, I also was able to attend Remembrance Day at the Kingsway Legion with my good friend from Edmonton-Manning, which the Legion there calls home. It was great, as the member said, seeing so many different people out there showing their support, showing their recognition, showing their gratitude for the veterans, for the members that serve currently and all that they do for us, whether that be in a combat theatre, whether that be in a crisis situation here in our province. They're always ready to step up.

It was also great to see a couple of helicopters from 408 squadron that did a flyby at the same time. I will absolutely stick, pun intended, Madam Speaker, to my guns that the flight simulator over at the Canadian Forces base Namao for 408 is not as easy as it looks. I would have thought as a video gamer that I could just get in there

and shoot up all the bad guys, but uh-uh, no. It is much, much more difficult than that.

But I will take just a quick opportunity, you know, because I'm so grateful for all of these heroes, to also thank some of our other heroes that we have here in the province of Alberta: our front-line health care worker heroes that are out there each and every day for hours and hours on end battling COVID-19, our first responders that are getting those initial calls, and, quite frankly, everybody that's involved in trying to get past this pandemic. They're all heroes, in my mind, each and every day trying to keep Albertans safe, trying to keep food on their tables. I'm so very grateful for them as well.

You know, I think back, and, as I said – I've been on the record on this – I've always felt that we've just never really done enough for our veterans, be it when they're coming home from a theatre of combat and how to help them to be able to come home and settle in. I've always thought that we've not done a very good job at that. We have to do better.

I think back, of course, to when the NDP were government and some of the things that we were able to do with the advocacy of my good friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs: opening up the Veterans Service Centre and transitional housing for homeless veterans, which leads me to the Homes for Heroes project. Believe it or not, the ribbon cutting for that project will be on November 25. I'm very, very excited to be able to attend that and to see that project finally come to fruition because that's going to mean a lot for homeless veterans, either regular forces or reservists, to be able to take part in and, you know, be welcomed back in a way that supports them with what they need to be able to defeat some of the challenges that they face each and every day.

You know, thinking about some of the legislation that was passed in 2016 around posttraumatic stress disorder: the awareness day on June 27; there were also increased supports around PTSD service dogs for military and first responders and specific agencies that also support these individuals as well; granting high school credits for Indigenous youth who completed the bold eagle program.

4:10

The reason I'm mentioning some of these things, Madam Speaker, is so that the government will take this private member's bill to heart and will not just stop there, because it's not enough just to simply recognize the work that reservists have done. You know, it's not enough to recognize the struggles that they may face. We also have to do something about it, and my hope is that this bill will be a catalyst for that, for those programs to continue to keep funding these initiatives to help our reservists.

One of the questions I did have throughout the debate – I was hoping for a bit of an answer for it – was around the changes we made in the amendment, from 26 consecutive weeks to 12. Again, I was fully supportive of that change, but it would have been nice to have heard back about what some of the businesses were thinking around that, what they thought might have been challenges with that. Again, I'm not saying that we should have not done that, because we should have and we will, but if there are challenges, how could the government step up to be able to help these businesses through that should it actually pose a bit of a significant challenge for them? Again, I was very supportive of that amendment. I believe that, you know, that's going to help individuals around making the decision to become reservists. Again, I'm hoping that Bill 207 will be a catalyst for these kinds of changes.

You know, I think about the deal that was just struck today around child care, how that is going to help our military personnel, our reservists, because sometimes it's child care that can be a barrier to that. I remember our government providing one of the \$25-a-day

child care centres up in the Cold Lake area for CFB 4 Wing Cold Lake and the military resource centre there. Hopefully, again, we see those kinds of changes continue. How can we make them better to reduce those barriers so that people will look at life in the reserves as a very viable and almost easy thing to do because they won't have all of these things over here to worry about, allowing them to make that decision to be able to serve and help Albertans and Canadians as a whole?

I think, Madam Speaker, I will probably conclude my comments at this time. My hope is that every member will overwhelmingly support Bill 207 going forward and that, again, the current government of Alberta will take it to heart, not just simply as a way to do the least and just, you know, support recognition but to continue to support our veterans in any way, shape, or form that we can as a province. Don't wait for the federal government to step up; we can do this ourselves here in the province of Alberta.

I'm very much looking forward to getting the opportunity to vote in favour of Bill 207 and seeing it proclaimed here in the province of Alberta.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour here today to stand before you and speak to Bill 207, the Reservists' Recognition Act. I just wanted to take a moment to start off by thanking the strong men and women that have served and continue to serve this great country and province. Secondly, I wanted to thank everybody who played a role in bringing this bill to this Chamber here today. It has the potential to impact and greatly benefit Albertans across our province.

Growing up, men and women who served were my heroes, larger than life characters. I remember spending countless hours with the House leader crawling around the yard and through the back alley in our camouflage and playing with sticks, all in an effort to be more like them. As a young man I aspired to join the army, recognizing that it was a way to serve my country and put myself forward to defend freedom and the values which our country stands for. However, it became very clear that a person who is half blind did not necessarily make the best soldier. So now as a father I am filled with gratitude for the sacrifice of so many in defence of freedom and our way of life, and I stand forever grateful that my children can grow up in a world that does not know the horror of war and the tyranny that too many have faced throughout our history. I'm happy to say that younger me was right; the men and women who serve our country are heroes.

That is why I have the utmost respect for our reservist men and women, because of their strength, dedication, and bravery. Each of these individuals is someone's son, daughter, brother, sister, mother, and/or father. These individuals put themselves at risk for everyone in this room and the rest of Alberta and this country, and that sacrifice is so great.

Bill 207 changes the current reservist leave format to make it easier for these incredible individuals. Reservist leave allows for military members to take time off work without the risk of losing their job. Employers must grant this, ensuring that the current position or equivalent is given back to them when they return to work. As of right now the reservist leave is set at 24 weeks before they are eligible. We hope to lower that number to 12 weeks to best support our military members. Whether these men or women are deployed or require training, we want to make sure that they can do both, keep our communities safe as well as keep their work, keep their jobs.

Reservist leave is a great thing and one that our military members certainly deserve. Many of these individuals have families that they

need to provide for, and this helps them with that. The government of Alberta is the largest employer of reservist force members as we recognize the strong leadership skills and exceptional contribution that these individuals bring to our communities.

With that being said, I believe it is essential to move from 24 weeks to 12 weeks to better support our military members and their families. This amendment would not change the total number of days but, rather, the parameters for eligibility. This change would bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions at 12 weeks before eligibility.

There are upwards of 2,300 reservists between Alberta's army, air force, and naval reserve units. Reservists support our communities through our natural disaster situations. For example, they supported the Slave Lake and Fort McMurray fires and in 2013 the Calgary floods, which I know we all appreciated. This is incredibly close to my home, and it's very important to my constituents in Calgary-Klein and for all Calgarians that they were able to help throughout that crisis. Not to mention that they participate in global operations alongside regular forces members in Latvia, Ukraine, and they have also participated in world wars, volunteered and participated in Afghanistan and other countries and in other humanitarian causes throughout history. Their commitment shows no bounds.

I am proud of the many initiatives and programs that our military liaison does to support reservists. One of our military liaison's initiatives is our Heroes in Mind, Advocacy and Research Consortium at the University of Alberta, which was awarded \$362,000 to develop web-based resources to build resilience among first responders such as our military members, law enforcement, and other emergency services and expand clinical trials to treat posttraumatic stress disorder. Other examples: look at the two-year pilot program, with a \$714,000 grant, at the University of Alberta to develop academic, social, and mental health supports for our veterans pursuing their postsecondary education as part of their transition back into civilian life.

Madam Speaker, while as Albertans we are so thankful for the work our reservists do, we often forget what they do daily. Calgary alone has six reserve bases. They are the 41 Canadian Brigade Group, the 41 Service Battalion, the 41 Combat Engineer Regiment, the 41 Signal Regiment, the Calgary Highlanders, and, last but not least, the King's Own Calgary Regiment.

4:20

It is essential to realize the contributions that these individuals and their families make to our communities, to give them the undoubted recognition that they deserve. There are specific dates that we make in recognition such as the military family day, which was observed on September 20, 2019; Veterans' Week, which is November 5 to 11; and Remembrance Day, of course, November 11. We also recognize April as the Month of the Military Child. These sacrifices, seen throughout individuals, families, and children, see huge impacts, and they deserve our recognition. Another important day is the reservists' recognition day. That date chosen for the reservists' recognition day correlates with the reserve open house, which provides the opportunity for people to visit their facilities and learn about what they can do and how people can get involved.

I have the utmost respect for our military members. Being thankful and giving recognition to our members and families is not nearly enough. That is why I firmly believe that lowering the eligibility for the reservist leave to 12 weeks is essential to both our community and the well-being of our military men and women and their families.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I rise today to support Bill 207, the Reservists' Recognition Act, my thoughts go back to last week, Remembrance Day, and the significant events that have taken place on that day for many years here in Canada. I just want to reflect on that because I think it helps us create context and the honour that's intended to the reservists in this bill.

On Remembrance Day, in Lethbridge, anyways, we had quite a beautiful day. It was right around zero degrees but beautiful and sunny. It's always incredibly moving to see the hundreds of people that come out and observe a few moments of silence and to recognize those that fought and died and paid the ultimate sacrifice for our country. It's so important. It's something that we really believe in, and it's meaningful that people take the time out of their days to come and show that respect that's due.

This year, because of the fine weather – and we were able to see it more readily than the years past – we had a number of fighter jets fly over precisely at 11 o'clock, flying in formation, hearing the bagpipes, and some of those kinds of acts. It was a very, very moving time. It probably struck me very hard. One of our former MLAs for Lethbridge had passed away just recently, and MLAs and MPs and other dignitaries often attend these kinds of events, so it was just a very powerful event for me this year. It's something that we do together.

I have the honour of attending this event with the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. She often brings her children to this event, and we lay a wreath together. There are many things that we would not necessarily agree on as part of our free and democratic society. Her favourite colour may be orange and my favourite colour may be blue, but on that day we do stand up together and honour those who have fought and served. We show co-operation on that level. That's something that I'm very proud of, that there are these kinds of events and these kinds of days that supersede whatever debates that we may have in this Chamber.

Then afterwards many of us go to our local Legion and sit down with members and veterans who have served and reservists and others that just feel that connection to that place. We take the time to eat and drink and talk and hear their stories. It's amazing what they continue to do in our communities. I'm very, very proud of that.

I do believe that this bill, Bill 207, would do the same for our reservists. We have a number of incredible individuals in Lethbridge that serve in our 20th Independent Field Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery, the Canadian Army Reserve unit right there in Lethbridge, and I've had the opportunity to tour their facility and walk and talk with them. These individuals, as has been shared by my colleague from Grande Prairie and other colleagues already, often have very full lives before they seek to further give back to their communities by serving in the reserves.

In 2019 our continued support for the role of military liaison, aiming to strengthen the relationship between the government of Alberta and the Canadian Armed Forces – I'm very happy for the Member for Leduc-Beaumont and the way that he serves in that role and continually works hard to make sure that that communication is happening and that that work is happening. A key aspect of this role in which he serves is the focus on helping military families transition to living within this province. They may have served all over the world. They may have served all over our great country. Then if they do choose to settle down and retire or spend further time in Alberta, his role is to continue to liaise with them and make sure that they are getting all the supports that they need.

Madam Speaker, many of these military families are those of our reserve forces. In Alberta there are upwards of 2,300 reservists between the army, the air force, and the naval reserve units. For those who might not be aware, the military reserve force is a

military organization composed of citizen soldiers who combine a military role with a civilian career. Reservists are capable and brilliant people who, on top of their military responsibilities, often work a full-time job in the civilian workforce or attend postsecondary school. Many of our reservists in Lethbridge will attend either Lethbridge College or the University of Lethbridge on a full-time or part-time basis and serve in addition to that. These individuals are a huge asset to any workforce or any postsecondary and are exemplary members of their communities. Their discipline, their service, their outward focus in their lives is clearly evident in everything that they do.

Reservists receive the same training as full-time soldiers but instead are available on reserve to aid when needed. The reserve force is an integral part, an integral component of our Canadian Armed Forces. Reserve forces have often been used historically during periods of war to supply personnel and increase the size of a peacetime standing army. One of my previous neighbours served in the reserves for many years, and it was an honour to see him last Thursday and spend some time catching up on the years of service that he put in as a reservist. He often spent time to increase that peacetime standing army size for different manoeuvres that were around the world. Reserve forces are a critical military asset as they are an available means of drastically increasing that size of the military available without having to have them on the payroll all the time. They work in reserve, and it is an incredibly important part of our military to be able to call on these people in times of need.

Reservists are also critical in the response to domestic crisis. The brave men and women who make up Alberta's reservists are always ready to jump up and answer the call to action in times of need in Alberta and across our country. Alberta's reservists were among those to answer the call during the Calgary floods in 2013. These brave men and women were also among those who provided aid during the Fort McMurray wildfires in 2016. Reserve forces also responded to the COVID-19 crisis in long-term care homes in Ontario and Quebec at the outset of the pandemic.

Madam Speaker, Bill 207 seeks to honour these incredible Albertans by increasing the public awareness of the invaluable contributions that reservists of the Canadian armed reserve forces make to communities they reside and serve in and recognizing the important role of reservists in protecting the safety and security of all Albertans. It recognizes the service of reservists deployed in international and domestic operations and honours the sacrifices made by reservists past and present. Bill 207, the Reservists' Recognition Act, seeks to accomplish these goals by establishing the last Saturday of September of each year as a reservists' recognition day.

Madam Speaker, Albertan reservists are always available to answer the call when their neighbours, both domestic and international, require their assistance. This often comes at great personal sacrifice to their families and their lives. These emergencies don't happen on a calendar. They happen at whatever time they happen, and literally these reservists drop everything to answer that call.

I'm very, very proud to support this legislation, and I thank my colleague from Leduc-Beaumont for the work that he's done in bringing it forward. I hope everybody would join us in supporting it and making this bill a reality.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: All right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise in this House. As I always like to do the first time

I'm back in the week, I'd just, obviously, give a huge shout-out to all those folks who are on the front lines, including those working in health care. We know that it's been an incredibly trying time, and it continues to be. You know, on this historic day I have to give a shout-out to child care workers, child care workers who are working all across this province but many in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, including at Boyle Street plaza, at the Stollery child care centre, where the announcement was made today. I was watching with a bit of FOMO as I saw the large group of folks at that child care centre. They do incredible work, so shout-out to them and to all the child care workers who've faced some pretty challenging conditions and have done amazing work for our kids and families.

4:30

I've had an opportunity, actually, to speak to Bill 207 many times. In fact, I think I've spoken to it at second and at committee, and now I'm here speaking to it at third as well. I think we can agree – and I've shared this multiple times in the House – that we are all so grateful for those who've served our country, including those who've served in the reserves.

You know, like many folks have shared today in the Chamber, I too had an opportunity to attend a service in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. In Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood we have one Legion not too far from my house, in fact, right near Commonwealth Stadium, where there is going to be a pretty significant soccer game tomorrow evening, and that's the Norwood Legion.

The Norwood Legion has really been an institution in our riding. They actually weren't going to have a ceremony this year, just with so much going on and COVID worries and whatnot, but they decided pretty last minute to do so. That morning I thought, "Oh, my goodness, this is going to be another year without a ceremony to attend in my riding," but I saw that morning that they were in fact going forward with one, so I cruised on over not too far from my house.

For those of you who have been to Remembrance Day ceremonies year after year here in Alberta, you know that it's often some of the coldest weather. It was incredibly beautiful this year in Edmonton. It was gorgeous. There was actually a really huge crowd gathered outside the Legion, so I was proud to see that. I spoke with some of the veterans and active service members who attended as well and had some really great conversations. I've shared, just talking to some of the folks at the Legion there, too, that having been an air cadet, I spent many a winter in Barrhead standing at the cenotaph, and it definitely built some character as you start in cadets when you're 12 and just shivering out there. As I've said before, it's a pretty insignificant sacrifice to make.

The Member for Leduc-Beaumont just mentioned that he wishes he had been in cadets, and I can tell you that, yeah, as I've said many times in this Chamber, it was a really incredible way for me as a youngster in a small town to learn about flight and flying. Many of my fellow cadets got their pilot's licence. As I've shared before, I have terrible vision, so I would not have gotten far with that, but also just the leadership side of things, to connect it to Bill 207, I shared that when I was a cadet, we had, actually, a number of volunteers who were veterans. I remember that there was a fellow who had served in the reserves as well. They shared their knowledge with us, of course, every time attending a summer camp or going to various camps across the province, having that opportunity to learn from folks who had served.

I look back on that fondly, and I think now that one of the best things we can do is obviously remember the sacrifice of folks. Also, commit to doing better because we've had – I'm certainly not

someone who is going to glorify war or anything like that. Actually, the pastor at the ceremony in Norwood talked about this, too, the opportunity to look forward and to do better – right? – and to reflect on what led us to conflict in the past.

These are conversations that we need to have, and I think young people – it was very heartwarming, for lack of a better word, to see many young people at the ceremony, the service that I was at at Norwood Legion. I saw some of the coverage from city hall and from – I look at my colleague from Edmonton-Decore who went to Kingsway Legion. Lots of young folks and families there as well. It's really an important educational opportunity – right? – and perhaps it's the social studies teacher in me, too, who just always thinks about: this is an opportunity, Bill 207, to have that conversation about how we do right by our veterans and by those who served.

As I shared as early as, I think, second reading on this bill, it is incredibly important. We're here, we've stood in support of this bill, so I'll couch my criticism by saying it's not a criticism of this, but it's a pause for us to really reflect on how we treat our veterans and those who have served, whether in the reserves or elsewhere, moving forward. So, yes, while we want to recognize them, we want that recognition to be more than just a day, to be more than just symbolic, I should say. That starts with things like investments in housing, right? We know for a fact that there are countless houseless veterans out there, veterans who come back, who struggle . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but according to Standing Order 8(7)(a)(iii), which provides for five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's bill to close debate, I would like to invite the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont to close debate on Bill 207.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I imagine she enjoyed her time in the cadets; again, jealous that I did not participate in the cadets as well. When we talk about the need to do more than just a recognition day, I wholeheartedly agree with that. I would like to thank the government for their support of veterans, of families, and current serving members: the Minister of Advanced Education, the associate minister of mental health, the Minister of Service Alberta.

When you buy the licence plate, the support-our-troops licence plate, that money goes to the Canadian Forces morale and welfare services, which directly helps families and serving members and veterans as well for things that they are in need of.

We've had good conversations with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health, the Premier, and the Minister of Seniors and Housing, lots of different ministries within this government. I imagine the support is wholeheartedly from the government but directly from those ministries that have all provided their time and efforts to try to provide services to support families and veterans in this province, and we've had success with that.

The veteran-friendly campus, that the Member for Calgary-Klein has spoken about, which is going to support veterans in postsecondary education. OSI-Can, right out of the Leduc Legion: grant funding to support peer-to-peer programs that are popping up all across the province as the stigma around mental health begins to drop and continues to drop. There are many people reaching out for support, and they're doing it within their own communities and, say, the veteran community in this case. There are people facilitating that, and I thought it was important to make sure that the facilitators were trained in providing that kind of support. As I went out to figure out, "Okay; what can I do about this?" it turns out that a group right

out of Leduc was already well ahead of me, which was great to see, and to provide them funding so that they can continue to provide that training across the province. And I think that they are reaching beyond just the borders of Alberta.

Homes for Heroes was brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Decore, which is happening, I believe, in your riding or close to it, and I was proud to have the government of Alberta support that initiative with just over a million dollars but also the support of the city of Edmonton with that as well. As we talk about the need to help veterans who are homeless, the transitional housing that already exists in Calgary with the Homes for Heroes village, they have shown success there, and that is being replicated in Edmonton. That organization, of course, is going across the country and trying to replicate that program in many other cities. I think it's a way for veterans to be able to come together, to support one another, to have not-for-profits in those areas support them as well, and to work on getting back on their feet, which is ultimately what they want to be able to do, to be able to support themselves.

4:40

You know, one of the neat things about being the military liaison for the provincial government is that I've gotten to go to different bases across this province, see some really cool things, a live tank exercise at Suffield, which I'll never forget, which was pretty cool. Also, to be able to drive around Cold Lake, get the tour of the Cold Lake air base, but also look for the house that my mom grew up in. My mom was a military child who moved all across this country as my grandfather was in the air force and in the military police as well. It's a neat experience to be able to look for those things, to be able to hear her stories as a military child, and to be able to take that in and then hear from families today about what their experience is like, what it's like for their children. And then to be able to do this work and to support them has been a real honour for me.

I want to thank also – the government has been extremely receptive to hearing the concerns that I bring forward and to providing tangible supports, which we have seen in the initiatives that they've supported throughout the last few years. This government deeply cares about our military community. I appreciate that, and I will continue to advocate for them and thank the government of Alberta but also thank our military families, veterans, and serving members as well.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:42 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Nally	Rutherford
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Neudorf	Sabir
Barnes	Nielsen	Sawhney
Ellis	Nixon, Jeremy	Schmidt
Glubish	Orr	Schow
Guthrie	Pancholi	Schweitzer
Hanson	Panda	Shandro
Irwin	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Issik	Pitt	Sigurdson, R.J.
LaGrange	Pon	Smith
Lovely	Rehn	Turton
Luan	Reid	Williams

Madu	Renaud	Yao
McIver	Rowswell	Yaseen
Totals:	For – 42	Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 207 read a third time]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Premier's Leadership

521. Mr. Sabir moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly censure the Premier for his failed leadership leading up to and through the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will begin my remarks by quoting the Premier himself. On April 8, 2020, the Premier told Albertans, and I quote: I'm the Premier and therefore ultimately responsible for the government of Alberta's response to this public health emergency. End quote. "I am responsible," he said. I hope that all members will keep those words in mind and remember that all this motion does is hold the Premier to the standard he asked to hold him to.

5:00

The motion is about the fourth wave of COVID-19 in Alberta. By any measure this wave has been a catastrophe. We have had tens of thousands of active cases at once, thousands of new cases every day. The infection rate in Alberta in September was 10 times higher than Ontario. Our hospitals and intensive care units have been packed full of COVID patients. This meant that tens of thousands of Albertans had their life-saving surgeries cancelled. Cancer surgeries, organ transplants, surgeries for children: all cancelled.

There have been hundreds and hundreds of deaths. I think every member of this House has heard from constituents who lost a loved one to COVID-19 in the fourth wave. I know that I have. We will be dealing with the legacy of the fourth wave for a long time to come, trying to reschedule surgeries, trying to support our exhausted and traumatized health care workers, but many grieving families will be dealing with the consequences of the fourth wave for the rest of their lives. We all know this.

But the heart of the issue is this. The Premier was warned about the approaching danger weeks in advance, and he did nothing. I'm going to say that again. The Premier was warned about the approaching danger weeks in advance, and he did nothing. On behalf of all the Albertans who have suffered so much through this fourth wave, this Legislature must hold the Premier responsible. I have many questions about the flawed decision-making that happened in May and June of this year. That's when the Premier and his office were cooking up their best summer ever idea. I have many questions about why the Premier told Albertans the pandemic was over and the scheduled teardown of the test, trace, isolate protocols. I have questions about the Premier and why he was so incredibly irresponsible to tell Albertans that there was no plan B if this unpredictable virus did something unpredictable.

Here is something we know for sure. We have the Premier's calendar from August through FOIP. His last workday was August 11, and the last thing he did on that day was take part in a COVID briefing. On that day there were 501 new COVID cases and 138 Albertans in hospital due to COVID. Then he went on holidays. As we have said many times, there is nothing wrong with going on holidays as long as you leave somebody, someone, in charge. It is not clear if that happened or not, and we have asked the Auditor

General to investigate this. There is almost nothing scheduled for the Premier during his holiday, which makes sense for a holiday, but there is a COVID-19 briefing on August 18 and another one a week later on August 25. By August 25 daily cases had more than doubled to 1,076, and hospitalizations had doubled to 284. It was clear that there was a serious problem in Alberta, and it was getting worse every single day.

I'm sure the Premier also saw modelling and forecasts that told him just how dangerous the situation in our hospitals was becoming. So what did the Premier do after receiving that warning on August 25? He did nothing. There was no emergency cabinet meeting, no meeting of the COVID cabinet committee, no conference call with senior public servants, not even a huddle with the senior political staff.

On August 26 the Premier went back to the beach in Spain or wherever he was and did nothing. He did nothing the day after that and the day after that and the day after that and the day after that and so on. He didn't take any action for 10 days. The danger was obvious, and the Premier did nothing while case numbers soared, the crisis in our hospital deepened, and Albertans died. In September and October there were more Albertans in hospital and the intensive care unit than at any point before in the pandemic or at any time in Alberta's history. We were forced to call in the Canadian Forces and other provinces and the Red Cross to send help. The Premier is responsible for that.

On that basis this House must censure him. I imagine that many of the members opposite are well aware of what happened. One of them I know for sure. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek wrote on Facebook on September 15, and I will quote him directly.

We clearly had 30 days notice that a crisis was looming . . . and nothing was done while we lacked any leadership at the helm. It will cost us lives and I am gutted by the lack of responsiveness to unequivocal advocacy and clear warning signals.

I am frustrated, embarrassed and angry that such defensible measures weren't taken 30 days ago, but I will have to live with the solace that my outspoken internal advocacy finally bore fruit, albeit a day late and a few hundred ICU beds short.

Actually, a few deaths as well, he should have added.

That was the UCP MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek. A government member says that there were clear warning signs in mid-August. He says that he himself spoke up and asked the Premier to act. Clearly, the Premier refused, and hundreds of Albertans paid with their lives. I am very interested to see how the member will vote this evening. So the question is: why did the Premier fail to take any action in August when all the evidence and all the professional advice clearly indicated that urgent and decisive action was necessary to save lives? The answer is pretty simple. It's cowardice.

The Premier is extremely unpopular in Alberta and is unpopular in his own party, in his own caucus. That's why he didn't act. By August 25 it was clear to everyone that the Premier had been completely irresponsible. That's the day he should have faced the facts and taken action, but he didn't. That's why I'm asking the Legislature to censure the Premier. The facts of what happened in the beginning of the fourth wave are well documented, the Premier's calendar is out in public now, and the case numbers, hospitalization numbers, and ICU admissions are also public record. We know when the Premier finally took action. A reasonable person can review those facts and see that the man who currently is our Premier failed to lead, and his failure to lead resulted in widespread human suffering and hundreds of deaths. Those are the facts, and that is reality.

This really should be a unanimous vote, but of course there are still politics. I hope that every member of this Legislature reflects on what went wrong, reflects on what happened, reflects on what

could have been done differently and instead of just standing up with their Premier, stand up for their constituents who have lost loved ones, who have had their surgeries cancelled. I hope that members will vote with their conscience.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader caught my eye, as did the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader, followed by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and respond to the Member for Calgary-McCall and his motion, private member's Motion 521. I suppose you could sum up my entire speech with simply saying: not a chance. But I will go into a little greater detail.

5:10

I do appreciate that this member has strong feelings on this motion and clearly articulated those in his speech, but I must admit that I am not surprised that the NDP continues to focus their efforts on discounting the actions taken by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. We see time and time again in their drastic claims that the UCP government has refused to act throughout the fourth wave of COVID-19. Now, I am here to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that that is patently false. It is undeniable that Alberta was hit hard with the fourth wave of COVID-19, the so-called delta variant, but the reality is that countless jurisdictions across the world were also facing a rise in case numbers, hospitalizations, and ICU bed occupancies at the exact same time.

Mr. Speaker, our government has been clear since the beginning of the pandemic that we are focused on balancing the needs of the economy while also keeping vulnerable Albertans protected from the virus. Most recently we have done this by implementing the restrictions exemption program, which has given millions of Albertans the ability to access restaurants, sporting events, and other large gatherings in a safe manner. The government of Alberta has consistently promoted vaccinations as the most safe and effective way to combat the COVID-19 virus, but I have made my points clear in recent days and even before that that we should also be looking at the potential of using and including natural immunity in those measures.

Since implementing the restrictions exemption program, we have seen Alberta vaccination rates climb up to 81 per cent for fully vaccinated. As part of the restrictions exemption program Albertans are now required to prove their vaccination status with a QR code. This action brings greater security in protecting private medical information of Albertans as well as making the process of verification more convenient for both customers and businesses. As we've seen in other jurisdictions around the world, there are also ways to implement natural immunity in such a program.

Mr. Speaker, the actions taken by the government to promote vaccines as well as the implementation of the REP doesn't sound like examples of failed leadership to me. Certainly, nothing is perfect in this world, but I can tell you that this government has taken many leaps and bounds to get as close to there as possible, balancing the important needs of the economy but also the demands of a health care system that is under siege of this virus. In fact, they sound like solutions put forward by a government that fulfills its promises in protecting lives and livelihoods in the province.

Although hypothetical the opposition has made it very clear to Albertans what kind of extreme measures they would be forced to adhere to should they be sitting on this side of the House. Now, the United Conservative government is committed to a more level-

headed approach in responding to the virus. Rather than following the NDP calls for extreme lockdowns and public health measures, we have not taken that direction.

Mr. Speaker, I take my job very seriously as the elected representative for Cardston-Siksika, and for the life of me I cannot understand why the Official Opposition can believe that Motion 521 serves Albertans in any way. The NDP claim that the Member for Calgary-McCall has focused his time in government on trying to give all Albertans the best quality of life, so I'm very interested to hear an explanation on how Motion 521 does that. Regardless of the outcome, Motion 521 will not bring more jobs to Alberta. It will not make living in Alberta more affordable. It will certainly not bring more major investments to the province. So rather than debating frivolous motions like 521, the United Conservative government is more interested in focusing time in the Legislature on Alberta's economic recovery.

In the past few weeks alone multiple announcements have been made regarding the increasing job numbers in Alberta as well as the billions of dollars being invested in our province's economy. These announcements include a major petrochemical facility in the Greenview Industrial Gateway near Grande Prairie, which will be a \$2.5 billion investment and create over 4,000 jobs during the construction as well as 400 long-term jobs once the facility is in operation. Dow Chemical also announced that they will be building the world's first net zero carbon emissions ethylene and derivatives complex. Mr. Speaker, these announcements are a result of the attractive policies set forth by the current UCP government.

Sadly – sadly, Mr. Speaker – any time there are things to criticize on this side of the House, you hear the chorus coming from the opposition, but if it's something that we have done right by their standards, well, of course, it was their idea. We saw that today with the child care deal, where the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud suggested that it was their deal. Last time I checked, \$10 is less than \$25.

Furthermore, policies like the red tape reduction strategy, the petrochemical initiative program, the skills for jobs strategy, the natural gas strategy, flexibility of municipalities to offer property tax incentives, preapproved regulatory zones, and investments in carbon capture and storage infrastructure have all helped make Alberta a magnet for this kind of investment. Alberta's tech sector is also seeing investment such as Amazon's web services building, their second Canadian hub, in the Calgary region. This is a \$4.3 billion investment. It'll create roughly a thousand jobs and follows numerous other investments in Alberta's technology sector.

In the month of October 9,000 new full-time jobs were created in Alberta. The current unemployment rate is now lower than it was at any point during the pandemic. Mr. Speaker, the United Conservative government is focused on getting Albertans safely back to work.

On the flip side, the opposition's focus is on censuring the Premier and his cabinet rather than discussing issues that would benefit Albertans. The NDP would rather spend time with a motion of no value whatsoever. I find it rather rich that the NDP would sit in this House and point out what they see as failed leadership while in government the members opposite did a tremendous job in demonstrating to Albertans that they had no interest in supporting the economy. Both debt and unemployment skyrocketed while the NDP was in office. That is a fact. Our United Conservative government is committed to the safety of all Albertans as well as balancing economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, I see no way that this Motion 521 benefits Albertans, and for that reason I move pursuant to Standing Order 8(4) that Motion Other than Government Motion 521 be moved to

the bottom of the Order Paper under Motions Other than Government Motions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 8(4), which reads that

before the mover closes debate on a motion under suborder (3), a Member may move a motion, not subject to debate or amendment, that provides for the motion under consideration to be moved to the bottom of that item of business on the Order Paper,

the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader has moved that Motion Other than Government Motion 521 be moved to the bottom of the Order Paper.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to move Motion Other than Government Motion 521 to the bottom of the Order Paper carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:19 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Nally	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Neudorf	Schow
Copping	Nicolaides	Schulz
Ellis	Nixon, Jason	Schweitzer
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Shandro
Glubish	Orr	Sigurdson, R.J.
Guthrie	Panda	Smith
Horner	Pon	Toews
Issik	Rehn	Turton
LaGrange	Reid	Williams
Lovely	Rowswell	Wilson
Luan	Rutherford	Yao
Madu	Savage	Yaseen
McIver		

Against the motion:

Barnes	Pancholi	Sabir
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Irwin	Phillips	Schmidt
Loewen	Renaud	Sigurdson, L.
Nielsen		

Totals:	For – 40	Against – 10
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[Motion to move Motion Other than Government Motion 521 to the bottom of the Order Paper carried]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 7:30 p.m.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:36 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	McIver	Sawhney
Amery	Nally	Schow
Ellis	Neudorf	Schweitzer
Glubish	Nicolaides	Shandro
Guthrie	Nixon, Jeremy	Sigurdson, R.J.
Horner	Panda	Smith
Issik	Pon	Turton
LaGrange	Rehn	Williams
Lovely	Reid	Wilson
Luan	Rowswell	Yao
Madu	Rutherford	Yaseen

Against the motion:

Irwin	Renaud	Schmidt
Phillips	Sabir	Sigurdson, L.

Totals:	For – 33	Against – 6
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[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m.]

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