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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 16, 2021

Day 126

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
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Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

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United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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

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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Members' Statements

Government Leadership

Ms Ganley: Is there an opportunity in this challenge? How we see an unexpected event or change in circumstances can determine how successfully we weather it. True on an individual level and on a provincial one. One thing I love so much about Alberta is that we see things as opportunities. We come together, and we rise to challenges. Well, most of us do.

It seems this UCP government is more interested in complaining than acting. It has certainly been true of their performance on the pandemic. They refuse to act. They refuse to plan. They act last, they act least, they hide from Albertans, they break their own rules, and then they whine. They whine about how hard leadership is and how mean people are for asking them to do it.

But that isn't the only file where the UCP have refused to lead. It's true of the economy as well. Climate change is real, it's human caused, and we should do something about it. These are facts, facts which are driving international investment. But the UCP don't want to do anything about it. They whine. They complain. They stomp their feet. They drag their heels. They refuse to act. They complain that things can't be the way they always were. They complain that they are expected to lead. Industry is adapting. Most major oil companies have made a net zero commitment by 2050. But not the UCP. While industry works to adapt, they stand around and complain. They blame everyone, from the federal government to children to international investment firms.

Alberta needs a government that can look to the future, that can see opportunities in diversification, in clean tech, and in so many others, that sees the critical role of universities and people and has a vision for the energy transformation. Alberta deserves a government that sees opportunities, not just problems, and if we all work together, in 2023 we can have it.

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

Teacher Misconduct

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers in Alberta are hard-working and incredible professionals, and I want to thank Alberta teachers, particularly those in my constituency of Calgary-South East, for their dedication to educating Alberta students. Sadly, however, there are instances where cases of gross teacher misconduct towards students, towards children, occur. As an MLA I've heard concerns from a number of parents regarding the disciplinary process in place for teachers and teacher leaders.

As a parent myself it troubles me that current legislation prohibits the government from communicating to the public details of the cases of teacher misconduct that result in a certificate suspension or cancellation, and there is no province-wide requirement for teachers to undergo a criminal record or vulnerable sector check when they are hired.

Mr. Speaker, it also concerns me that if a teacher is convicted in court of a serious offence like sexual exploitation of a minor, they and their victim still have to go through a lengthy disciplinary process before their teaching certificate is revoked. The fact that we

can have criminally convicted educators on the sex offender registry and that it can take years for the teaching certificate to be revoked is completely unacceptable. Children spend a significant amount of time in school learning from teachers. Parents need to be confident that their kids are safe and being educated by vetted and respectful professionals.

We need to bring forward additional checks and balances to protect our children that also respect and support the vast majority of teachers, who are in good professional standing. We need to increase transparency and accountability across the teaching profession and give parents peace of mind about the safety of their children in schools.

This is about the safety of our children and upholding the integrity of the teaching profession in Alberta, and I am hopeful that this government will make impactful changes in this area. I would like to thank the Minister of Education for committing to address this issue through upcoming legislation that puts students first.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Hindu Community

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hindu civilization is an ancient civilization which was established in the Indus valley. The Hindu word originates from the Sanskrit language word for the river Sindhu. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions, whose roots and customs were established more than 4,000 years ago. The concept of karma is one of the great philosophies of Hinduism, and yoga is one of the greatest contributions to the world from the ancient Hindu civilization.

The Albertan Hindu community has existed in Alberta for many, many decades and originates from different continents, including Asia, Africa, and South America. Today there are approximately 36,000 Hindus in Alberta. My constituency of Sherwood Park has many people from our Hindu community, and they are contributing to various fields such as health care, engineering, the trades, IT, et cetera. The Albertan Hindu community is also involved in business in my constituency and across Alberta.

Hindu community organizations in Alberta host their beautiful festivals like Navratri and Diwali celebrations across our province, including in Sherwood Park, with events being held at Festival Place and Millennium Place, for example. Our government recognized August as Hindu Heritage Month and celebrates the Diwali festival. Our government has also included the principal teachings of Hinduism in the draft K to 6 curriculum. This is the first curriculum in Alberta to include direct, detailed knowledge about the Hindu religion, and I strongly, strongly support including the teaching of the Hindu religion and Indian civilization in our curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, the Albertan Hindu community's contributions to our province have been many and great. Last weekend hundreds of community members joined other communities in Calgary to help our Minister of Infrastructure collect a record 50,000 pounds of food for veterans. I am proud today to recognize and celebrate the community's accomplishments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Nielsen: Since taking office, this government has been consistently focused on making life more expensive for Albertans. There's not a single minister sitting on that side of the House that hasn't increased costs for Alberta families without a second

thought. They hiked income tax. They hiked property tax. They hiked school fees. They hiked insurance premiums but aren't worried since the Premier was able to save \$200. They hiked utility fees and power bills. Tuition is up, and interest on student loans is up, all while this government tries to gut the postsecondary education system, all applauded by every UCP MLA.

They deindexed benefits for seniors, those with disabilities, taking money from the pockets of the vulnerable without blinking. They tried to take money from the pockets of nurses, attempting to slash their pay as another wave of the pandemic was looming.

Under the UCP it's more expensive to own a house, heat a home, have an income, drive a car, go to school. They've even found a way to make it more expensive to be older and to have a disability. But in a daring sense of hypocrisy that Albertans have come to expect from this UCP government, while Albertans are expecting to pay more, UCP MLAs get more. The Premier casually shells out tens of thousands of dollars to fly his friends around on private planes. The Premier gave a \$12,000 raise to the Deputy Government House Leader, which he used to protect the Premier from being held accountable. Under the UCP teachers, nurses, and doctors are given too much, but the Premier's team deserves a bump in their paycheques.

My colleagues and I have been hearing for months from Albertans who have seen their cost of living skyrocket as a result of the UCP – sky-high power bills, huge insurance increases, heating bills increasing, too – and a government that just does not care. Albertans are fed up with a government that asks them to sacrifice more just so the UCP can take more and more to reward their friends, and in 2023 Albertans will have a government that is on their side again.

Tourism Industry

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an abundance of natural resources, but our best one, the one that oftentimes gets overlooked in policy discussions around natural resource development, is the natural beauty all around us. As the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis I am lucky to represent the highest concentration of this natural resource anywhere in the province. Many jurisdictions pride their tourism economies on man-made attractions, but here in Alberta our tourism economy is founded in that God-given beauty all around us and the abundance of recreational and sport tourism opportunities it provides.

Sport tourism contributes \$770 million to Alberta's GDP every year. Just this month alone the men's alpine ski world cup, the women's alpine ski world cup, the World Para Nordic Skiing World Cup, and the Canadian Mixed Curling Championship are all happening right in my constituency. On average, these events garner international viewership of 35 million people per event and generate an economic impact of \$7 million per event. Our government recently committed \$1 million to fund the design work for the Nordic Centre upgrade, which will make Alberta the single and only biathlon A-licence holder in North America, enabling it to host even more of these high-calibre events.

1:40

The natural beauty of our province also supports a massive recreational tourism industry. Recreational tourism contributes \$5.5 billion in GDP to our provincial economy and over 36,000 jobs, with an employment rate 6.1 times greater than that of both forestry and logging.

Mr. Speaker, we are surrounded by some of the most iconic landscapes in the world, and with the right policy developments we can grow Alberta's recreation and sport tourism industries into a true provincial economic driver so that people around the world can

not only enjoy our natural beauty but make memories in it. I'm so proud to be the MLA for beautiful Banff-Kananaskis and proud to be an advocate for the development of an expansion of recreation and sport tourism in Alberta.

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

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night Albertans got a look at where this UCP government stands. It is not with the thousands of Albertans who contracted COVID-19 during a fourth wave that could have been prevented had they done their jobs. It's not with the hundreds of families mourning the loss of friends and loved ones. It's not with the 15,000 and counting Albertans who have lived for months in pain and fear because their life-saving surgeries were cancelled because of this UCP government's incompetence. It's not with the front-line health workers who worked tirelessly to keep our health system afloat after the Premier's best summer ever nearly collapsed it.

Our caucus listened to these groups, ignored and often attacked by the UCP, and proposed censuring the Premier for the repeated failure he had shown in the fourth wave of COVID-19. Where did the UCP stand on this critical motion? They chose not to stand with Albertans who, after months of suffering and sacrifice, were looking for accountability from this government. Instead, with a smirk they chose to turn their backs on the Albertans impacted by their decisions and stand with the Premier. Forty UCP MLAs voted to support the least trusted Premier in Canada. That is shameful. That is cowardly.

Albertans want answers, and it is crystal clear that the UCP will do anything and everything to stop that from happening. They will find time to sell hats, they campaign against vaccine passports, and they gave one of their MLAs a \$12,000 raise. But, Mr. Speaker, despite what the UCP claims it does, trying to get answers for the tens of thousands of Albertans suffering is not frivolous. Despite the roadblocks that this government continues to throw up, the Official Opposition will continue to seek justice for those who have suffered and continue to suffer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Minerals Strategy

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is on the verge of an economic rejuvenation that begins with the passage of Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act. Over the past year I've worked with the Minister of Energy and her team on the renewing Alberta's mineral future strategy, and I'm so excited about what the strategy and the proposed legislation mean for Alberta's economy in the decades to come.

Environmental sustainability and renewable energy have always been important issues to me, not only because of the dangers that climate change presents to our way of life or because of my strong desire to have our residents live and play in safe and clean communities but also for the economic potential that environmental sustainability and renewable energy bring to the diversification of our economy and the creation of new, great-paying jobs. With legislation tabled on extended producer responsibility, encouraged by my Motion 510 last year, we're going to see the recycling industry expand and create jobs and landfill diversions increase, resulting in savings to taxpayers.

Bill 82 will do the same for Alberta's renewable energy industry. Demand for critical minerals is rising across the world as renewable

energy becomes more cost-effective and as businesses and governments begin to transition to a low-carbon economy. We have many of these required minerals here in Alberta, including lithium, uranium, vanadium, nickel, potash, diamonds, and many, many more, but Alberta has not utilized these resources. Instead, North America heavily imports these minerals from China, Australia, and from numerous African nations who have questionable human rights and environmental records.

Alberta can and should step up to provide these resources to spearhead a low-carbon economy. We care about human rights and environmental protection and have incorporated this in the oil and gas industry for decades, and we could do the same with rare and critical minerals. Alberta's economy is at a turning point, and Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act, is the beginning of this transformation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Métis Week and Louis Riel Day

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week we celebrate the Métis, and we use this time to celebrate all the contributions the Métis people have made to our society economically, culturally, and spiritually. Today we join the Métis people in celebrating Louis Riel Day, which serves as a reminder of all the things he accomplished on behalf of the Métis people. He fought to preserve the Métis way of life, safeguard their culture, and he was a key figure in the formation of the province of Manitoba. Today Alberta continues to respect the legacy of Louis Riel through our support of the Métis people as we walk the path of reconciliation together.

Our government has made it a point throughout our term to strive towards economic independence for the Métis people to ensure that they benefit from the opportunities that responsible resource development has to offer. Just yesterday our government signed a grant agreement with the Fort McKay Métis and the Willow Lake Métis to fight back against the federal Oil Tanker Moratorium Act, also known as Bill C-48. This bill prevents the transport of hydrocarbon products from Alberta's oil sands, with no mention of the dirty oil imported from the Middle East or the dirty coal that gets exported from British Columbia. More than \$372,000 from the Indigenous litigation fund will help to challenge the constitutionality of federal legislation that directly harms Métis economic success.

This past September the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation announced a \$40 million loan guarantee to support five Métis communities in my region to acquire a 15 per cent stake in the Northern Courier pipeline. They along with three First Nations will see long-term economic security for decades to come.

Like Louis Riel, our government knows that a strong Métis people contribute to a strong nation, and we are putting in the work to make sure that the Alberta Métis are free and prosperous. I invite all Albertans to celebrate and be proud of Louis Riel and what he stood for.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Economic Recovery and Diversification

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week was an amazing week for Alberta. Of all the great announcements around job creation and investments in our province, one of them stood out. Heartland Generation announced that they have phased out coal-fired generation at their Battle River and Sheerness generating stations in favour of cleaner burning natural gas, reducing their

greenhouse emissions by almost half. This makes Heartland Generation the first large-scale electricity generator in Alberta to fully phase out coal-fired generation in favour of natural gas. It's an important step in their decarbonization strategy, which may include carbon capture, utilization, and storage as well as investments in hydrogen. This change is not only great for the environment but also great news for our growing natural gas industry and Alberta's economy.

Every day we can see that Alberta's recovery plan is working, with explosive growth in Alberta's tech sector that has seen Infosys, Mphasis, RBC, and Amazon Web Services invest billions to create jobs right here in Alberta, coupled with billions more in everything from hydrogen to petrochemicals. With all of these investments seen, Heartland Generation couldn't have picked a better time to make the transition to natural gas.

Alberta's recovery plan continues to build on our strengths while harnessing entrepreneurs, job creators, and innovators to diversify our economy, to create jobs now and for the future. Part of that diversification is brilliant innovators like Heartland Generation as they harness new technology to reduce emissions while growing our economy. We are showing the world that Alberta is the best place to invest in, grow, and call home. This amazing announcement by Heartland Generation is a great example of private enterprise actually reducing emissions without government overreach or intervention.

Thank you, Heartland Generation, for taking these important steps. I can't wait to see what you have in store for the future, reducing GHG emissions while still providing reliable, sustainable, and safe power to Albertans.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the call.

Education Concerns

Ms Hoffman: This week trustees are gathered for the Alberta School Boards Association's fall general meeting, and they've overwhelmingly voted to scrap the backwards, racist curriculum being pushed by the UCP and the current Premier. I was at the ASBA this morning. Almost every trustee I spoke to ran on a commitment to stop this curriculum, and Albertans supported them accordingly. To the Premier: if you won't listen to parents, teachers, and school trustees across this province who want the curriculum stopped, who exactly are you listening to? Give us names of specific people who currently support the UCP government's garbage curriculum.

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're listening to the more than 1 million Albertans who voted this government into office with a commitment to stop the NDP's effort to turn the curriculum into left-wing politics. They elected this government to hit the pause button, to go back and openly consult with parents and subject matter experts in developing a curriculum that would present tried, true, and tested teaching methods to reverse the decline in math proficiency and literacy in our schools, and to promote greater and objective civic literacy as well.

Ms Hoffman: The Premier definitely didn't campaign on putting Chris Champion in charge of the curriculum.

The motion supported at ASBA was constructive. It called for the government to work with school boards and educational partners to create a first-class curriculum with staggered implementation of subjects and grades for students and teachers. This is reasonable,

unlike the secret pilots being run by this minister at schools across the province which she won't identify. Will the minister commit today to actually working with teachers, parents, academics, and community leaders to create something that we can be proud of instead of the current mess that she's forcing on Alberta students?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, for over 15 years we have seen a decline in math proficiency for our students in our school system, which puts them at a competitive disadvantage in an increasingly digitalized and competitive global marketplace. This is a curriculum that will give them the building blocks of math proficiency, of numeracy to succeed in the future.

But let's talk about other issues. The NDP – we just came through Remembrance Day – proposed a curriculum for K to 6 that had not one single reference to our military history or to our glorious fallen, to the 120,000 Canadian war dead. Why did they seek to whitewash out of our history our veterans and our military?

Ms Hoffman: The Premier should be well aware that what he said is not true.

At ASBA trustees also told me that the current Minister of Education and government are failing them when it comes to student transportation. The minister knows that there are major problems with transportation. That's why she set up a review of it more than a year ago. Now because of skyrocketing insurance rates, caused by this government, for bus drivers, many are losing money, and they're threatening to pull their services completely. Why doesn't this Premier care about getting kids to school? Why won't he fix the problems that he's created?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the member asked about curriculum. Imagine the temerity to do that when her government had proposed a K to 6 social studies curriculum which had zero reference to Canada, Canadian history, Alberta, Alberta history, parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, or any of the basic foundational concepts of our history and our identity and, shamefully, not one single reference to the 120,000 Canadians who gave up their lives in the defence of our democracy. Thank goodness we stopped the NDP curriculum.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert is next.

Ms Renaud: That was very bizarre.

Income Support Supplementary Shelter Allowance

Ms Renaud: Last year this government cut the additional shelter allowance, which pushed Albertans onto the streets. It was cruel. It was a cold-hearted decision, but it gets worse. Today in Public Accounts the Deputy Minister of Seniors and Housing told me that there was no analysis done on whether this cut to shelter allowance would impact homelessness. We are facing a homelessness crisis. To the minister of housing: why didn't the government do any analysis before pushing people onto the streets?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, this government has significantly expanded support for homeless shelters and women's shelters throughout the pandemic, an initial response in March of last year of \$50 million, that we've since enhanced. In fact, tomorrow . . . [interjections] I guess they don't want to hear the answer. Tomorrow I'll be joining the Minister of Community and Social Services for a very important announcement about additional support for those who work on the front lines, particularly in emergency shelters, to ensure that everybody can have a warm roof over their heads during these cold winter months.

Ms Renaud: This is what they do. They slash and burn, then give a little back. Last year there were 20,000 people on the list for social housing. As of November 1 of this year the list was at 24,000. That's a staggering 20 per cent increase in one year. Today it's freezing out, and there are more vulnerable Albertans desperate for shelter because of the cruel decisions this government has made. In just eight months nearly 3,000 people have lost shelter allowance. That's half of everyone that was getting the help. What does the Minister of Seniors and Housing say to Albertans who are now on the streets because of the cuts you have made?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in the House last week, the shelter allowances have been there since 2009. There's no policy change there at all. The opposition keeps mixing up the fact that some offices interpreted that . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I heard the question. I'd like to hear the answer.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I said earlier, the policy has never changed since 2009, and what happened is that some offices misinterpreted some of the benefits. We did a review, and we cleaned that up. As of today Albertans who are eligible for shelter allowances . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: I'm astounded by the inability to take responsibility. Kicking nearly half of the Albertans off the shelter allowance in just eight months in a crisis of homelessness that's being felt in every corner of this province: that's the record of this UCP government, and it's nothing to be proud of. It's immoral. It's unconscionable. Will the minister stand up and apologize and tell us what is the plan? What is the real plan to get people a safe place to sleep?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, the only party that is shameful about this is – they only know how to dump money without knowing how to make a difference in people's lives. This government has taken responsibility not only in our current budget – we have \$49 million committed for shelters – but, in addition, with COVID we added another \$132 million, helping with isolation support, increased shelter enhancement. Tomorrow the Premier will make another announcement. Fact speaks louder than political cheap shots.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the UCP used historic suppression tactics to impede the rights of private members in this House. Now, this Premier talks about his respect for parliamentary traditions, but when it's his failures, he's less grassroots and more scorched earth. He's never met a forum within which he couldn't abuse his authority. Party members can expect more of that this weekend, I suspect. Now, if this impression is wrong, the Premier can fix it. Why doesn't he bring forward a government motion allowing the members of this House to vote on his failed fourth wave leadership?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the members of this place did vote to defer that motion, and they used the appropriate parliamentary procedure to do so. We know why the NDP wants to

focus on driving political wedges around COVID. It's because they are terrified of talking about the huge economic recovery happening in Alberta right now. Last week was a \$7 billion week for the Alberta economy: the \$4.3 billion Amazon investment, the \$2.5 billion Northern Petrochemical investment, the \$117 million irrigation investment, just as a start.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday every member of this UCP caucus had an opportunity to stand up for their constituents and tell this Premier that what he did over the summer to Albertans was not okay. They missed it. While the Premier's happy to say that the CMOH moved to endemic too fast, he avoids the subject of his European vacation/work trip and his MIA cabinet. This collective failure delayed action for weeks, increasing cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. Will he rise now and take responsibility and apologize for that specifically?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, both I and the chief medical officer spoke to that on September 3. The NDP is desperate to continue trying to divide people on the basis of the pandemic rather than unite Albertans in enthusiasm for this economy, which is leading the country in growth. You know, the NDP talked a good game about diversification, but they were a total failure. Last week we saw by far the largest investment in the high-tech sector in Alberta history, that will contribute \$5 billion and 1,000 jobs to our economy.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are united over the preventable loss of over 15,000 surgeries over the last two months. This House has established a clear picture of what happened this summer. Despite claiming that he was in charge while in Europe, the Premier either can't remember critical details, or he claims that he wasn't told. Despite claiming that his cabinet was on the job, no one sitting next to him can explain where they were. Despite claiming that he was in daily contact with Dr. Hinshaw, no e-mails were sent, and the calendar is empty. History shows that good leadership is about taking responsibility for mistakes. Why won't the Premier at least do that? The clock is ticking.

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we know two things about the NDP on COVID. First of all, they have seen it as an opportunity for political division from day one, and, secondly, they would have had this province on a hard, Australian-style lockdown with schools shut from day one. Thank goodness they couldn't be there to inflict that kind of damage on this province, but we haven't just been hit on the health care side but also deeply on the economic side. Here's the good news. Alberta is leading Canada out of the COVID pandemic recession and into the highest growth that this province has seen in years.

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

Ms Notley: Actually, Alberta's economy is still behind pretty much every other province in the country notwithstanding what this Premier likes to claim.

Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement

Ms Notley: Now, yesterday our province did take a good economic step forward when it comes to child care, and good on the Premier. I know that torturously awkward press conference couldn't have been easy. Heaven knows, it was quite painful to watch. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, universal child care appears to be coming. Parents deserve

it, our economy needs it, so to the Premier: when will Alberta see fees reduced for all Albertans to \$10 per day, and what investment will he make to make sure that happens?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that she never had an awkward news conference with Justin Trudeau when she was Premier because when he said jump, she said: how high? We know that the NDP wanted to sign a made-in-Ottawa health care deal on day one. They didn't want to fight for this province, just like they threw us under the bus with Trudeau's cancellation of Northern Gateway, just like they surrendered on his killing of Energy East, just like they joined him in doing nothing to fight the presidential veto on Keystone XL. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government was elected to fight for Alberta. That's exactly what we did with the Minister of Children's Services' brilliant effort to get a good deal for Alberta parents.

Ms Notley: This Premier's unwillingness to talk about child care just goes to show why his distraction with other things resulted in a four-month delay to the podium, which has already cost families an average of \$3,000 each. This is about putting more Albertans back in the workforce and about creating more early learning opportunities for young children, but this government already has a bad habit of either fighting with the feds, ignoring their federal money, leaving it on the table, or slow-walking programs promised to Albertans. This is a chance for the Premier to reverse that record. Will he?

Mr. Kenney: Well, I thank the NDP leader for pointing out that we have a reputation for standing up to Ottawa on behalf of Albertans, Mr. Speaker. That's what we were elected to do, not to surrender. They would have surrendered on day one. Do you know why? They're opposed to choice in child care. They wanted a deal which would exclude the majority of Alberta kids in child care, who are cared for in private businesses and day homes and informal care. This minister fought all the way through to midnight on Saturday to get the best possible deal, a made-in-Alberta deal.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned, just as evidenced by the Premier's comments there, that he's going to make Alberta families wait because he really doesn't believe in affordable, accessible, universal child care. While other provinces have committed additional funds to get it done, yesterday's announcement didn't include a single additional cent from this government. Alberta's child care funding is already behind other provinces. At this speed Albertans wouldn't trust him to cook Minute rice, let alone rebuild or roll out a child care program. Why won't he show some hustle, show us exactly when he's going to add additional incremental dollars, give us a schedule, walk it through, and commit something to Albertans that they can hold him accountable for?

Mr. Kenney: Well, apparently the NDP wants on top of this \$4 billion investment in child care, a made-in-Alberta investment that responds to choice for parents, apparently she wants us to spend billions more. When asked by the media earlier today, she didn't even know how many billions more. I do know this, though. She was Premier for four years and didn't put that money on the table for enhanced child care. She promised her voters and members that she would. She broke the promise, Mr. Speaker. What we're going to do is deliver this made-in-Alberta deal. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is the only one with the call.

Technology Industry Investment in Alberta

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier and the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation announced an exciting new investment in our province. Amazon – yes, that Amazon, the Jeffrey Bezos one – is investing in Alberta through their Amazon Web Services division. Now, I know a lot about Amazon. I watch Prime Video, I get packages all the time, but I'm not actually really sure exactly what Amazon Web Services is or what they do. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell us: what exactly does this investment entail?

Mr. Kenney: It entails a \$4.3 billion capital investment in three major cloud data processing centres. Mr. Speaker, this isn't like consulting firms providing soft services. This is hardware. This is by far the largest investment. We're talking a huge construction project and then a thousand permanent, high-paying, high-tech jobs. This is one of the world's largest tech companies putting its stamp of approval on Alberta. This is the success of Alberta's recovery plan. This is a response to everything this government has been doing to diversify our economy, attract investment, and create jobs.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier. Amazon Web Services clearly put a lot of thought into where they wanted to make this historic investment, and the fact that they picked Alberta speaks volumes about the success our government is having in attracting all this new investment. My question is to the Premier or to the minister. How large is the investment, and what does it mean for the Calgary tech sector and our overall economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As I say, the direct investment is an amazing \$4.3 billion. Amazon Web Services projects will expand Alberta GDP by \$5 billion and create a thousand ongoing jobs, not to mention thousands of upfront construction jobs. This is by orders of magnitude the largest tech investment in our history. It is a game changer. There are only 24 similar scale Amazon cloud processing facilities on the face of the Earth. Now one of them is here in Alberta. This is a total game changer for our high-tech industry and for diversification.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's tech sector has seen huge gains and increased private-sector investment since the United Conservative Party formed government and given that this is making up for the terrible investment decline we saw under the one-and-done NDP when they chased investments out of this province – now, we know about the new Amazon investment, the largest tech-sector investment in provincial history, but can the Premier or the minister tell us about other recent tech-sector investments in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we had the creation of a thousand jobs announced by a major multinational, Infosys; another thousand jobs from Mphasis, another major company; Rogers announcing the creation of their national centre of excellence for engineering and telecommunications in Calgary; 500 high-paying jobs in partnership with the University of Calgary centre for quantum computing; the Royal Bank of Canada moving

300 positions from Ontario to Calgary; a huge expansion of venture capital, which is the jet fuel of high tech. This industry is on fire here in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a question.

Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement (continued)

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are celebrating that we finally have a deal for \$10-per-day child care, but after the minister held a town hall with operators last night, a number of serious concerns about the UCP's plans to implement that deal have come to light. Wages for early childhood educators in Alberta rank in the bottom three in Canada, yet the wage grid promised by the minister includes no increase in compensation for them. Alberta lost 1 in 5 educators over the past year, and we need pay increases to rebuild our workforce. The Minister of Children's Services claims to understand that educators are key to quality child care, so why isn't the \$300 million from this deal being used to make sure they're paid properly?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, in fact, yesterday was a great day for Alberta parents and, of course, their children and child care and preschool providers right across Alberta because we were able to sign a deal for a made-in-Alberta plan that addresses our unique needs. Yes, \$300 million is being invested to support our early childhood educator workforce. We do in fact have the highest wage top-ups in the country, and there is flexibility in those dollars to support professional development and training, upgrading and skills, and to continue those wage top-ups with the flexibility for providers to fund their educators right across the province.

2:10

Ms Pancholi: Educators need to be paid properly. Given that last night the minister said that grants provided to operators would be based solely on current enrolment and not their licence capacity and given that due to COVID and increasing costs current enrolment in child care is well below usual levels and funding based on current enrolment will mean that providers won't have enough funding to operate, to the same minister: how does your plan address the current low enrolment situation for operators, and how will they be able to sustainably stay open with this funding model?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, this plan is a made-in-Alberta plan that is based on the feedback that we received from child care operators and parents right across Alberta. We're respecting and reflecting the choices that parents make each and every day when they go back to school or they take part in the workforce, which is hugely important for our economic recovery. If you want, the member opposite could quit playing politics for a quick second and get the facts straight. This will support inclusion, affordability, high-quality child care, and create a minimum of 42,000 spaces right across the province, and it's actually costed.

Ms Pancholi: These are very real questions, and the minister has no answers.

Given that the minister also told operators last night that this deal does not include out of school care, a key part of child care for families, and there's no plan to address this for another four years and given that Alberta parents and families need access to

affordable before-and-after school care in order to fully participate in the economy, which is why our NDP proposal included it, and given that this plan means parents will pay more for one to two hours of before-and-after school care than they would pay for eight to 10 hours of full-time care, to the same minister: how can this be considered a real plan for Alberta families when the thousands of parents who use out of school care are excluded?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I also want to remind the members opposite that this \$3.8 billion is in addition to the nearly \$400 million that we already invest. In the bilateral agreement that we recently signed, just this summer with the federal government, we did in fact expand supports to out of school operators to ensure that they can provide top-ups to their educators and also to increase the subsidy levels for those parents as well. We are listening to Albertans, and we are delivering high-quality, affordable, accessible child care so that they can spur on our economic recovery. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

British Columbia Floods and Mudslides

Mr. Dach: British Columbia has been ravaged by rainstorms, trapping motorists on highways and forcing the evacuation of an entire town. Our hearts go out to every single Canadian who has lost their home to the devastating floods and mudslides throughout the province. We hope for the best outcome for those who may be missing amid the carnage we've seen. Many Albertans also travel to and from B.C. for work, to visit family, and to vacation. Can the Minister of Transportation please inform this House if she has been in contact with the B.C. government and whether every Albertan potentially impacted by this disaster is accounted for and is getting the support they need?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for this very important question. I'd also like to say that our thoughts are with the residents and the travellers who are in B.C. right now, who are impacted by the rain and windstorm. Yes, my office has been in contact with the B.C. ministry several times. In fact, I will be speaking to the minister later this afternoon to inquire not only about the residents in B.C. but also about all of the Albertans who are stranded there at this moment.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Minister.

Given that we have heard from Albertans who are currently scrambling to find a safe way off the destroyed highways and are now looking for flights and other safe modes of transportation to get home and given that many feel lost and helpless in a very stressful time and these Albertans need swift action and explicit instruction on how to access help, can the minister please advise these families of those trapped with information on how they can help their loved ones? Are there specific resources or a helpline within the ministry that they can contact?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing this information. It's important for me to liaise with the minister in B.C. as well to understand what their needs are and to ask them exactly what Alberta can do to assist. We want to make sure that we're not in the way, but certainly we will also reach out to our civil society partners and ask for donations to be made to organizations in B.C. so that help can be extended. We are going to do whatever we can do that is within our power. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dach: Given that we have seen other provincial governments come to our aid in times of crisis, including most recently as our health care system nearly collapsed due to the UCP's failure to lead during a preventable fourth wave of COVID, and given that it is now our turn to do the right thing and support our neighbours in B.C. as they grapple with a massive disaster and given that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is tasked with emergency management, can the minister inform this House in detail what assistance and support is being provided to the B.C. government? Please be specific.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that our department keeps in touch with B.C. I'm not aware that they have made a request for our assistance. I'd be happy to inform the House if that happens, but to this date I'm not aware of any such request.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a question next.

COVID-19 Vaccination Policies

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While it is one thing to encourage vaccinations against COVID-19, it is another thing entirely to presume consent to a vaccine using old consent forms. Information is always changing, and parents may change their minds on what is best for their children. Recently I heard a concerning rumour that AHS would accept consent forms from 2019 and 2020 as presumed consent in 2021. To the Minister of Health: can you please clarify what is going on here, and can you commit to restoring the need to require current parental consent forms if necessary?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. No child will be vaccinated against COVID-19 or anything else without their parent's permission. Parents must attend the appointment and provide verbal consent or provide a signed consent form. Now, AHS does have a policy for routine catch-up immunizations, where they will use the signed consent forms on file. That may be the reason for the letter referenced by the hon. member. But to be clear, these forms are vaccine specific and do not apply to COVID-19 immunization.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that when it comes to requiring COVID-19 vaccines for health care workers, Ontario and Quebec have reversed their decision to put unvaccinated workers on unpaid leave and given that they are doing this to make sure that they have enough health care workers in place and given that there are serious concerns about how some rural health care facilities will be staffed if we continue to require vaccines going forward, to the Minister of Health: will the Alberta government be changing course like Ontario and Quebec by not requiring vaccines for our health care workers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It is imperative that Alberta's health system continues to run smoothly. One thing that will ensure as few disruptions as possible take place is for front-line workers to remain healthy and COVID-19 free. Vaccines work. That's why AHS continues to actively promote and educate staff about the importance of getting immunized for COVID-19. As of

November 8 95 per cent of AHS full-time and part-time employees and 97 per cent of physicians are vaccinated. Now, this deadline was extended to give them more time for people to increase their vaccines. AHS has made a commitment that this policy will not impact service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that immunity to a disease is determined by the number of antibodies that we have to it and people can develop these antibodies through natural infection and given that serology tests can determine the number of antibodies that someone has and given that countries like Germany are recognizing natural immunity as part of their restrictions, to the Minister of Health: how does Alberta not have evidence available to support how long natural immunity from COVID lasts when we do have it from vaccines that have not been around as long?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member. Now, as the hon. member knows, our government's policies will continue to reflect the evolving research on COVID-19. We are assessing this issue. Now, at this time what we are seeing is that vaccinations continue to be the best way to keep Albertans out of a hospital. It's the safest way to get COVID-19 antibodies. That's via immunization, not infection. We heard that some Albertans may have concerns about the mRNA vaccine. That's why 5,000 doses of Janssen vaccines are now available in Alberta. I encourage everyone to get vaccinated by calling 811.

Trails Act

Mr. Schmidt: The government introduced its Trails Act with the promise that it would support recreation in Alberta for the future, but as Albertans have come to expect from this government, this act delivers the exact opposite. The minister's new process works independently of any land-use planning or assessment. The minister is free to designate trails when and how he pleases. Now Albertans are just supposed to trust this minister to designate trails in a way that protects our outdoors. Albertans had to work very hard to stop this minister from selling parks and from mining the eastern slopes for coal. How are they supposed to trust him given his track record?

2:20

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing that you can always count on is that hon. member being wrong. The Trails Act does not work independently from land-use planning. Land-use planning processes take place all across the province. They are still continuing to. That legislation would trump any other type of decisions that are made when it comes to trails, and the Trails Act will work hand in hand with land-use planning going forward. What Albertans can trust is that this government will never do what that hon. member did and that the NDP did, and that is to shut them out of their backyard. Instead, this government will stand up for Albertans to access the special places that they want to.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister made it clear last night that he thinks that without designating a lot more trails, Alberta would close all of the backcountry to Albertans and given that his own department has warned that linear disturbances are potentially already at a critical point and given that this minister and the UCP caucus in general have a well-documented history of ignoring science and given that his act has no mechanism to assess what the

additional impact of a trail is, can the minister state if he will create any process that will protect our outdoors from him designating trails left and right?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, at its core, again, that hon. member and his party and the people that are around them are dedicated to stopping people from being able to access the trails that they want to access in this province. That's their record. They spent their time in government trying to ban people from the eastern slopes. This government has a plan that has been asked for by trail groups, including cross-country skiing, equestrian, hiking, and, yes, off-highway vehicle organizations, for years, and this government delivered on that promise yesterday by bringing in the Trails Act.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that we're also at a critical point on the legal limit for linear disturbances and given that the Trails Act doesn't ensure that the minister complies with any legal requirements before designating a trail and given that Albertans have learned that they cannot trust the minister's word that he'll do the right thing and given that the minister has made it clear that he intends to increase the amount of trails and given that it is not the first time the minister has tried to implement significant changes to our outdoors like selling parks and coal mining the eastern slopes, can the minister tell us if this is a sign of what's to come? Are we putting our beautiful outdoors at risk instead of protecting it for future generations?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, one thing that you can count on is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to come to the Chamber and make things up over and over.

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: But do not worry, Mr. Speaker; this government has fulfilled its commitment to trail organizations all across the province with our promise in the election to bring forward a Trails Act that will help defend those hard-working conservation organizations all across this province. Defend them from who? Defend them from that member and his party, who went out of their way to try to block those groups from being able to build trails, went out of their way to stop trails from being built, and we will make sure that can never happen again inside this province.

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has a question.

COVID-19 Long-term Effects

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, since the pandemic began, more than 325,000 Albertans have been diagnosed with COVID-19, 91,000 of those in the fourth wave alone, a wave that was preventable had this government only done its job. AHS estimates about 20 per cent of those folks will have symptoms of long COVID, Albertans like Stacey Robins, who since March of 2020 still suffers from extreme fatigue, migraines, brain fog, and tremors in her hand, which forced her to close her small business. What does the Minister of Health say to the 91,000 who contracted COVID during the fourth wave that his government could have prevented and may be facing long COVID?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I stated in this House numerous times, we reacted to the fourth wave, bringing in the REP and bringing in a number of measures to be able to protect Albertans and also focus on increasing vaccinations. Those have been

successful. Vaccinations have increased significantly, by well over 10 per cent. We are just over 88 per cent in terms of vaccines for single dose, 82 per cent for double dose. Those numbers continue to rise, and my focus is to get those numbers up so we can protect Albertans from issues such as long COVID.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the question is about long COVID and AHS's own estimates say that 65,000 Albertans will suffer from it, 18,000 of whom were infected in the fourth wave, and given that as a result of this UCP government's negligent best summer ever tens of thousands of Albertans are facing these serious long-term health consequences and given that this Health minister and this Premier have yet to publicly acknowledge long COVID here in the Legislature, I will ask now: will this Premier or Health minister rise and acknowledge that long COVID is real and then explain exactly what supports are coming for people who are suffering from these long-term adverse health effects?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government continues to focus on increasing vaccination rates to protect all Albertans not only from this potential for the severe outcomes from COVID but also other impacts that may be affecting the health of Albertans. I know that studies are ongoing. We will continue to watch those very carefully, and our system will react to that as the research comes forward from this so we can protect the health of Albertans now and into the future.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that it's bizarre that this minister will not simply say the words "long COVID" here in this House and given that last week we as the Official Opposition presented three actions to this government to address this emerging crisis with long COVID and given that, should the minister need a reminder, they included a long COVID task force structured as a strategic clinical network under AHS, guidelines from that task force to the Community and Social Services department to assist Albertans with unlocking supports and protections, and to have this government acknowledge and plan to help these Albertans, to the minister: will the government simply adopt the recommendations, or will you continue to bury your head in the sand while Albertans struggle?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the suggestions. Our focus and our government's focus is getting through the fourth wave. We are looking at increasing vaccinations to protect all Albertans and also looking at: how do we increase surgeries to do that? The hon. member mentions that there are potential negative impacts from COVID. He mentions long COVID, and that's the colloquial term for that. These issues are being researched right now. I have full faith in our health care system in terms of doing the research and ensuring that we have the supports in place over the long term to be able to support the health needs of all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has a question.

Hydrogen Strategy

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been the most environmentally and socially responsible energy developer in the world. Because of oil Alberta was the first jurisdiction in Canada to put a price on large industrial emitters. Alberta's oil and gas companies are some of the top private-sector investors in clean

technology, and Alberta's providing global leadership by investing in emission reducing technology like carbon capture utilization and storage. Can the associate minister of natural gas share with the House what the government is doing to continue this responsible legacy?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the fall of last year we released the natural gas strategy and vision. It included a component on hydrogen. When the NDP saw this, they demonstrated their usual childlike enthusiasm, and they went out and wrote a 10-page paper on hydrogen and called it a strategy. It was a high school book report at best. We had a different approach. We spent a year consulting with academics. We worked with industry, and we came back with an articulate, meaningful, and actual plan that we can use to drive a low, clean, affordable hydrogen future.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta is already the top hydrogen producer in Canada and the Alberta government recently released Alberta's hydrogen road map to help make Alberta a global leader in the hydrogen economy, can the minister share with the House how hydrogen development can help lower emissions for Alberta's already world-leading energy sector?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the socialists' approach to the environment is to subsidize bad business, regulate good business, and tax everybody else. We know that because they taxed \$100 million worth of investment out of this province. Well, we have a different approach. We are going to get out of the way of business and let industry lead the way into a cleaner energy future. That's what the hydrogen road map does. It's about creating the right pulls and levers so that business can be successful. Businesses are embracing our approach as they announced five world-scale facilities in the last 10 months.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta's economic recovery plan is working and has already attracted direct hydrogen or hydrogen-carrying project investment from Shell, Dow, Air Liquide, Suncor, EPCOR, Mitsubishi, TC Energy, and Northern Petrochemical, representing tens of billions of dollars in clean energy investment in this space, can the minister share with the House the economic benefits of Alberta's hydrogen road map?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we are on the cusp of one of the greatest economic recoveries in our province's history, and hydrogen is going to be on the forefront of that recovery. By 2050 hydrogen will be a 2-and-a-half-trillion-dollar industry, and we are confident that we can generate a significant amount of that investment right here in Alberta. We can lead the way in investment for the province and jobs for Albertans. Now, the road map lays out specific steps to advance hydrogen adoption in a way that benefits the Alberta economy, to achieve a widespread integration of hydrogen for the benefit of our environment and our economy as we create generational wealth.

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

2:30 Alberta Serious Incident Response Team

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nine months ago Alberta's Serious Incident Response Team's executive director, Susan Hughson, warned that ASIRT was at a critical breaking point. Today we have learned that the investigative body for serious incidents involving law enforcement is still attempting to process cases dating all the way back to 2018. This is unacceptable. It's been nine months, and the minister has done absolutely nothing. Why is the minister refusing to act and support such a critical body that ensures police accountability in matters that involve serious injuries and even deaths?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud of the work that Alberta's Serious Incident Response Team has done and continues to do for the people of our province. I can assure this House that ASIRT has got the resources that they're needing to continue to do the important work of keeping Albertans safe. I am in constant touch with my department, and I can assure this House that if further resources are required by ASIRT, those resources will be made available to them.

Mr. Sabir: Given that ASIRT is important to increasing public trust and confidence in our law forces and given that, contrary to what the minister just said, the minister has actually reduced funding for ASIRT and made the situation worse and given that the minister seems too preoccupied with his misguided and unsupported attempt to create an Alberta provincial police force, can the minister please detail what specific action he is taking right now to fix the issue, and when can Albertans see the results? The question is about ASIRT, and be specific.

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised that the Member for Calgary-McCall talked about the Alberta provincial police, but here is a member that enjoys the benefit of law enforcement being closer to him while he is in Calgary. The people that live in our rural communities deserve the same, and that is why I am working with all law enforcement agencies in our province to keep our people and communities safe.

Mr. Sabir: Given that we have seen a consistent caseload increase in ASIRT cases over the years and that there seems to be a concern that the Crown seems to be hesitant to prosecute ASIRT files and given that the minister has not taken any meaningful steps to address issues facing ASIRT, the question is: why is it this minister doesn't care about police accountability and is busy supporting the Premier's political games and raking in dark money in our elections in favour of his superrich friends?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I have spent several months consulting with the law enforcement community, Albertans, from communities to communities. We have embarked on the largest review of the Police Act since its inception, in 1988. If that hon. member has any ideas on how better we can strengthen ASIRT, I have an open-door policy.

Red Tape Reduction and Health Care Premiums

Mr. Nielsen: The recently introduced red tape bill makes a number of changes. While reading the bill, my eye was initially caught by the changes to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act to include a new section on health insurance premiums. Introducing health

premiums in the midst of a pandemic would be awful, so I hope that's not the UCP's intent. I am curious on why these changes are being made, though. Can the associate minister commit clearly for the record that this government will never introduce health care premiums?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is making quite a stretch from simply reviewing past legislation and our red tape bill. What I can say is that this government is committed to reducing red tape, to modernizing our regulatory environment. We inherited an F from the previous government. We already have an A according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and we're not done yet.

Mr. Nielsen: I didn't hear a no.

Given that the UCP has called these changes a simple consolidation of acts – and Albertans are left to wonder what the purpose of these changes was – and given that the changes regarding health insurance make up a significant portion of the entire red tape bill, can the minister explain the policy intention of these changes in consolidating the acts, and have there been any changes at all to how health care insurance premiums can be used? Can the minister please be specific and explain why . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The changes that the hon. member is speaking to: it's a consolidation of two acts. There is no change in the acts in regard to the premiums. The intent and the language there is the same as it was before. That remains. What we're simply doing is consolidating the two acts to make it easier to use, to be easier to be able to reference, and to reduce the red tape when individuals need to actually make referral to it.

Thank you.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that if we take the UCP on their word that this is simply administrative and does not have an impact on ordinary people's lives and given that meanwhile there are many businesses who have not received emergency pandemic support – there is clearly red tape that is keeping much-needed cash out of the hands of small-business owners – and given that many of the businesses have had to close because of the inaction of the UCP government, can the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction please explain why she is more concerned about administrative changes that apparently have no impact on ordinary people instead of working to get much-needed support to small businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To date our government has cut 18.3 per cent of Alberta's red tape while maintaining both safety and environmental standards. More than 500 red tape reduction initiatives have been completed to date. It's very rich to hear the members opposite act like they all of a sudden care about Alberta businesses. They had four years to fix our regulatory system and did nothing. And why don't we revisit the CFIB's report card rating while the members opposite were in government? In 2016, F; 2017, F; 2018, F. Under our government, A. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Hate Crime Prevention

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that vulnerable groups and institutions have had their security eroded over the past year as we've seen a remarkable increase in hate-motivated incidents and crimes. Our government has taken steps in protecting our province's vulnerable groups and institutions by standing in solidarity with them and by providing those groups with access to government grants to develop their security. Given that our government has proven that it's committed to protecting Alberta's most vulnerable institutions, what is the associate minister of multiculturalism doing to ensure that these vulnerable groups will be protected in years to come?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Albertans from all backgrounds deserve the freedom and protection they need to live and worship safely and free from the threats of violence and destruction. Due to an increase in hate crimes, harassment, and vandalism in Alberta, the province has created a grant program for infrastructure upgrades and for training to better protect targeted organizations from vandalism and violence. The Alberta security infrastructure program provides grants for upgrades such as security and monitoring systems and security training and planning to help protect both people and property.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Given that we've seen funding to vulnerable populations through the Alberta security infrastructure program and given that this program comes as an opportunity for vulnerable groups and institutions to improve their security, their training, and their surveillance and given that the improvements that these vulnerable organizations are receiving will significantly increase their protection from hate-motivated crimes and incidents, will the Minister of Justice please comment on what he is doing to ensure that funds are being distributed and will be used effectively?

Mr. Madu: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, this government has been quick to act to protect vulnerable Albertans. The emergency Alberta security infrastructure program has provided over \$250,000 in rapid grants, and we continue to accept grant applications. Up to \$12,000 per applicant is immediately available for those who need it. Albertans should feel safe when they are celebrating their culture or in their worship places. That is why this government has provided \$2 million for the Alberta security infrastructure program. We are keeping Albertans safe.

2:40

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Minister. Given that our government is extending the most support possible to vulnerable organizations in their time of need and given that the government is committed to creating a province that is welcoming of all cultures and given that we are committed to protecting all Albertans, what is the associate minister of multiculturalism doing to ensure that in the future these vulnerable organizations have access to key contacts and programs in the government when they are faced with a hate-motivated crime?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member again for the question. In addition to the Alberta security

infrastructure program, that will help protect both people and property, the province is taking several steps to address hate- and bias-motivated crimes. There is a community liaison on hate crimes that is being established to engage with the communities most affected by this criminal activity, and a new hate crime co-ordination unit is being established to improve crime prevention and mitigation practices throughout the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to Introduction of Bills.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Bill 85

Education Statutes (Students First) Amendment Act, 2021

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 85, the Education Statutes (Students First) Amendment Act, 2021.

This important legislation would further ensure safety for students, confidence for parents, and accountability for teachers. Parents, who put their faith in Alberta's education system, should have confidence that their children are safe when they go to school. The overwhelming majority of teachers are incredible professionals. However, when disciplinary matters do arise, the process should be timely and transparent. The students first act is the first step in improving this process for our students.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to discussing and debating this important bill in the House in the very near future. I am both proud and honoured to be able to move first reading of Bill 85.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 85 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Prior to the break I cited a CBC article many times in a speech that I was giving about the provincial government failing to pay their taxes and cuts to the grants in place of taxes, and I'm happy to table that CBC article today.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? It would appear not.

Hon. members, I do have a tabling this afternoon. Pursuant to section 63(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 95(1) of the Health Information Act, and section 44(1) of the Personal Information Protection Act I have the requisite six copies of the annual report of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the period April 1, 2020, through to March 31, 2021.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act the Report of Selected Payments to the Members and

Former Members of the Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly, year ended March 31, 2021.

The Speaker: Hon. members, points of order. At 2:23 there was a flurry of points of order that were called. The Official Opposition House Leader has risen on the point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). At 2:23 the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was asking questions of the Minister of Environment and Parks, specifically talking about the Department of Environment and Parks' warning that the linear disturbances are potentially already at a critical point with the Trails Act and asking the minister about his record given that Albertans have had to work very hard to stop the minister from selling parks and coal mining the eastern slopes, all things well documented both inside this Chamber and out. The Minister of Environment and Parks, who is also the Government House Leader, said that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was coming into this Chamber and making things up, a very clear accusation of misleading this House and something that only 20 days ago, that exact language, was found to be a point of order.

Now, I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that when faced with some very reasonable questions about the very poor record this minister has had, he has used this accusation of making things up to distract and to deflect attention from his own record. I would further submit to you, finally, Mr. Speaker, that on June 11, 2020, that Government House Leader used the exact same language to accuse me of making things up. I submit to you that he knew this would be a point of order, that this was unparliamentary. He should apologize and withdraw, and he should rise to the occasion of his office of Government House Leader and do better in this place.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that this is a point of order, and I'll tell you why. It is not unparliamentary to criticize statements by members in this House of being contrary to the facts. Now, I can understand there is a very harsh word that's been used in this Chamber on both sides of the House: lying. That is, without question, unparliamentary. However, in this instance I may even tend to agree with the Minister of Environment and Parks that the member was making things up. The reality is that the Member for Lethbridge-West, while that minister was answering the questions, was nodding her head in agreeance with the minister's statements.

The reality is that you cannot come into this Chamber and say the things that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was saying and not get called out for it and criticize the remarks that that member was making, so I do not believe that this is a point of order. In fact, there is precedence where this has been used in the past and not ruled a point of order by yourself, Mr. Speaker, and there was an incident where the hon. Leader of the Opposition said – and this is on *Hansard* on page 1986 in 2018, November 20, where the Leader of the Opposition said:

Northern Gateway was managed by the former Conservative government of which the member opposite was a part. Take some responsibility. Also, he should stop making things up.

That was referenced later, and you, Mr. Speaker, did say that you'd "provide some general caution today, but in my opinion this hasn't met the threshold of a point of order." I also don't believe this is a

point of order, and as such I would hope that you'd rule in that manner.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I am prepared to rule. I disagree with the position of the Deputy Government House Leader as he has cited occasions where this exact terminology has been used, and I provided general caution. I then went on to provide additional caution with respect to the use of it and specific members, which is exactly what took place today. The Government House Leader referred very specifically to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar making things up. You can't do indirectly what you can't do directly. As such, in accordance with my previous rulings that you failed to cite, this is a point of order, and he can withdraw and apologize.

Mr. Schow: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Excellent apology. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at orders of the day.

Some Hon. Members: Ordres du jour.

The Speaker: If you wanted the job, you could have run for it. But it's Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 81

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.
2:50

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2). This bill is about strengthening democracy in this province, getting foreign money out of Alberta politics, and establishing a set election date.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

In the fall of 2020 the Legislature's Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee held public meetings and accepted written submissions about possible changes to Alberta's Election Act and Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. The all-party committee provided their report and recommendations to the Legislature. The Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Speaker, also provided proposed changes for the 2019 provincial election. We used the committee's report and the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations to inform the work about the changes before this Assembly today.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 81 would make significant amendments to the Election Act and Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act and make a significant amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), would also make amendments to the following pieces of legislation: the Alberta Senate Election Act, the Recall Act, the Citizen Initiative Act, the Legislative Assembly Act, and the Local Authorities Election Act. These amendments would ensure that the language in the act is consistent throughout all electoral legislation.

If passed, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), would ban foreign money in provincial politics. It would do this by only allowing those who live in Alberta to make election advertising

contributions during an election period. It would also ban people living outside of Canada and non-Canadian corporations or organizations from making political advertising contributions. These changes would prohibit other jurisdictions from unduly influencing Alberta elections and ensure that only those who have a real stake in the outcome are involved.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 81 would also impose an annual \$30,000 limit for donations to third parties, which most in this House know as political action committees. It would also close the Alberta Federation of Labour, or AFL, loophole that the NDP created and that allows undue interference in our elections. It would also keep political parties, candidates, and constituency associations from making political advertising contributions to third parties.

This legislation would also establish a formula for determining the amount political parties can spend on elections. Currently, Mr. Speaker, there is a flat limit of \$2 million. This does not reflect the actual cost of campaign expenses today. The new limit would be \$1.16 per registered voter, which would be in the range of \$3.5 million. This is the same as the limit in British Columbia and the formula used in other Canadian jurisdictions. Getting rid of a flat cap on party election expenses puts us in line with almost every other Canadian jurisdiction.

Some additional changes proposed in Bill 81 deal with nomination contestants, who are people seeking to become official candidates in a constituency. One amendment would increase the expense limit for nomination contestants from 20 per cent to 25 per cent of a candidate's limit. Another would make it so that contributions to the nomination contestants are not part of a donor's maximum contribution limit. In addition, these contributions would no longer be tax deductible.

Mr. Speaker, when this government first came in to office, one of our priorities was to establish a set election date in Alberta for provincial elections. Doing this would level the playing field for all political parties. It would remove the advantage the governing party currently has with the three-month election window and increase trust in our democratic process. With this bill the last Monday in May will become the day Albertans would go to the polls to elect a provincial government. As a result of this set election date, Bill 81 would also set the start of the campaign period as the day the writ is issued instead of February 1, making voting easier for Albertans.

Speaking of voting, Bill 81 would make voting easier for all Albertans. It would allow for increasing the number of advance voting stations where needed to make it easier to vote early.

Amendments in Bill 81, Mr. Speaker, would also help voting stations run more smoothly by allowing election officers to perform a wider range of duties instead of being restricted to specialized roles. This bill would also move us into the 21st century by allowing voting cards to be sent electronically as well as by mail.

One change that would help both Albertans and those working at voting stations is requiring voters to produce identification to vote in provincial elections. This is the practice in federal elections, the majority of Canadian jurisdictions, and in Alberta's municipal elections, and it would help increase confidence and integrity in Alberta elections. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. If an Albertan is unable to provide identification, another voter may vow for them. This would not change.

The Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), would also modernize the wording in election legislation. For example, proposed changes include changing terms: "polling day" would become "election day," "advance poll" would become "advance vote" or "advance voting," "poll book" would be changed to "voting record," and "polling station" would be changed to "voting station."

Bill 81 would also make minor amendments to other acts to ensure that words and phrases are consistent throughout all election

legislation. It would also add references to the Recall Act and the Citizen Initiative Act to election-related legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), will strengthen democracy in Alberta. It would get foreign money out of our provincial politics, and it would make voting easier for Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading, and I urge all members to support this important legislation.

With that, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 76

Captive Insurance Companies Act

Mr. Dach moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 76, Captive Insurance Companies Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 76, Captive Insurance Companies Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 3: Ms Hoffman]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 76, which is Captive Insurance Companies Act. I think this is an interesting bill because I think that, you know, there's a lot to be said about it. There are a lot of questions about it, and it is potentially a good thing but potentially a bad thing. It does answer a need, which is . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. My apologies. I should have made it clear from the outset. We are on REF1 as well, just for the member. Okay. Thank you so much.

Ms Ganley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and we will definitely get to that.

Yeah. What's interesting about this bill is that it does actually answer a need, which is not that common in terms of bills introduced by this government. Typically they introduce bills that are what could kindly be referred to as a solution in search of a problem. In this case there is actually a concern around the ability of these certain businesses in this province to secure insurance, and this bill provides a solution to that problem, so in that respect it is potentially good, but, as with so many things, the devil is in the details, and that, Mr. Speaker, is why I would support this amendment to refer this bill to a committee, because I think that the details are insufficiently clear in this legislation. In particular, I think that things have been left to regulation that maybe were not best placed in regulation.

3:00

I think the first thing worth noting about this bill is that the substance is in the regulations. Why that is important is because when we're talking about insurance companies, they play a large role in finances, in our legal system. People are sort of vaguely aware of insurance, but they're not necessarily aware of how prominently it affects so many aspects of our lives. The question here is ultimately: who profits, and who loses? If the government sets risk tolerances for these sorts of insurance companies at a higher place than they would normally be, that potentially allows for greater profits for the companies who are owning the captive

insurers. In addition to getting insurance that they could not secure from the private market – a good thing – they're potentially generating additional profits. Potentially a good thing, but with that chance for additional profits potentially comes the chance for additional losses.

Now, arguably, the company is adjudicating that, but depending on the way the structure is set up, if the insurer is a separate legal entity or sufficiently separate, if the insurer goes bankrupt because it has been sort of overly risky, those losses don't necessarily flow to the company. Potentially what happens is that the company does something negligent, which is adjudicated to be negligent by the courts, and it's required to pay out through insurance. If the captive insurance company were to go under, then the person who loses in that situation is the individual who is suing. Potentially that's a company that's suffered losses; potentially that's an individual.

Just so we understand the sort of general principles that underlie this – and I'm not saying that this is an example that would necessarily apply in this case. The importance of insurance when you're driving a car. You are legally required to have, at minimum, third-party insurance when you drive a car. The reason you are legally required to have that is that, say, if you run over a pedestrian, it is your insurance that pays. The reason that's a big deal is that that person and their family may potentially suffer really significant losses as a result of that. It's possible that you hit someone and, worst-case scenario, that individual was the breadwinner for their family, a family with, say, four minors in it. That's very, very costly to that family because now that income, the income which supported that individual, potentially their spouse and four children, is gone, and there is no support for those people.

In those cases damages tend to run high. They tend to run in the \$2 million, \$3 million range, and the reason for that is, you know – say that this is a catastrophic injury. The individual can no longer work. You have to retrofit their house. You have to compensate their family for that loss of money and of support. You have to compensate the individual and make sure that they're still cared for. In a situation like that, if the insurer went under, there's no one to pay for that family, no one to support them. They have suffered a loss at someone else's fault, and there's no backstop. That's a really big concern. That's why we like insurance companies to be comparatively low risk, to avoid the chance of those insurance companies going under. That's why it's important that insurance companies sort of make wise financial decisions.

That leads me to my concern with the bill and the reason I'd like to see it go to a committee to further discuss these issues. I think that they should be discussed before Albertans and in the light of day. Behind closed doors in cabinet – the truth is that Albertans don't particularly trust this government, and particularly they don't trust this government when it comes to the ability to adjudicate risk, which is exactly what will be happening in terms of setting the regulations for this bill. We will be asking this UCP cabinet to adjudicate what a reasonable risk would be on behalf of Albertans, the same cabinet that did nothing about the risk of the fourth wave and let it overwhelm Albertans, let it overwhelm our hospitals, let it cause cancellations to surgeries, let it cause long COVID, let it cause deaths, let it cause further impacts to our economy.

That was a really big risk that they took on our behalf, and it is the people of this province who pay the consequences for that risk. Never once have they apologized. Never once have they demonstrated that they have an understanding that what they did was wrong.

Now here they are with this bill, asking us to trust their assessment of risk. Mr. Speaker, I don't trust this UCP cabinet. I don't trust their assessment of risk, and I think there is very good reason why I don't trust it. It's one thing to make a mistake and then

admit that it was a mistake and to say that you will do better in future. That has not happened with the fourth wave. Not one member of the UCP cabinet has provided an explanation or an apology for complete failure to make decisions, complete failure to assess a very real risk, a risk which was brought to their attention by members of the opposition, by members of the public, by health experts, by economics experts, by pretty much anyone that could read a graph, to be honest, and they just completely ignored it, one very demonstrated instance in which their assessment of risk was very, very bad and the consequences for the people of this province, the people for whom we are all supposed to act, were incredibly grave, can be potentially incredibly far reaching and long term, and they have not demonstrated at all that they have learned from that.

Another point, I think, when we're talking about investment risk tolerances and how we adjudicate investment risk tolerances – because, again, that's being left to the regulations here; it's being left to the UCP cabinet to do that behind closed doors – is a statement of the Finance minister. He was being questioned about this Premier's gamble on Donald Trump's re-election. This Premier gambled \$1.3 billion not of his money, not of the UCP's money but of Albertans' money on Donald Trump's re-election, and he lost. He gambled that money and he lost. And the Finance minister has referred to it in question period as a, quote, unquote, strategic risk.

Mr. Speaker, we're talking about what they term a strategic risk. There was less than a 50 per cent chance of success. At the moment that they made that decision to gamble on Trump's re-election, he was behind in the polls. There was a less than 50 per cent chance that he was going to be re-elected. His opponent had made clear what his position was with respect to the project. Whether we agree with that position or not is irrelevant. You can't disagree with gravity. The United States is a foreign government. They have the legal right to make those determinations. In fact, you know, most experts have been pretty clear coming forward, but I don't really think you need an expert to know that.

This is the sort of risk assessment that this cabinet is making. They look at an investment, a risk assessment on which they have less than a 50 per cent chance of success, and on that basis they call it a strategic assessment and basically throw away \$1.3 billion, money that could have been used in our health care sector, money that could have been used for affordable housing, money that could have been used to stimulate our economy, money that could have been used in universities or schools or just about anywhere else. But this government claims that this was a strategic risk.

3:10

This is the source of my concern with this bill because, again, it's potentially a good thing, but it depends on how they're setting up the risk assessment. I mean, I would love to be provided with an instance in which this government performed a good risk assessment, but on the two clear occasions on which there was a clear risk and they were asked to assess that risk on behalf of Albertans, they have failed on every measure. In neither instance have they come forward and apologized, have they said: we made the wrong choice, we have learned from our mistakes, and we plan to do better.

I think the concern here, coming forward, is that we don't trust them, and we're not the only ones. It's not just the opposition that doesn't trust this government; it's the public. I mean, the response to everything this government does is negative, and it's because people have lost confidence. A lot of times, you know, a government can make some mistakes and have them sort of go by, but in this case, with this government, the public outcry has been huge. Now, arguably, it's because they have been bigger mistakes, but also it's because, I think, we've seen a lack of trust.

I think that this bill belongs in committee. I think that it is right to send it to a committee and to adjudicate it further because it is, again, actually an answer to a problem that exists, which is a rare positive for a bill that has come forward from the UCP government. Potentially it has the ability to do some good because companies who cannot be insured kind of cannot operate, right? This is important. I'm not suggesting it isn't. I think that probably it's a necessary bill.

My issue with it is that it creates somewhat different parameters for how those companies are permitted to invest and sort of what risks they're planning to take on. The reason that is problematic is because if the risk turns out well, the chance for profit vests with the insurance company, which then potentially flows back to the company itself, which will presumably be a shareholder – maybe not. Maybe it stays with the insurance company. Either way, it doesn't really matter because the issue isn't the chance with profit; the issue is with the other part of the risk assessment, which is the chance of loss, the chance that the insurance company will go under.

The insured company doesn't necessarily bear that risk because if the insured company wrongs someone, the point of insurance is to pay out to those other people. Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day no one trusts this government to do that work.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 76, the Captive Insurance Companies Act. Of course, we are speaking on a referral amendment, which I plan to support. This, as the previous member stated, seems like something that very well could be an important move and something that is indeed necessary for companies across the province moving forward. We know that more and more as we look to the future, we are seeing an insurance market that is hardening, and it is in many instances becoming harder for companies from a variety of backgrounds to get insurance for a variety of reasons as well but on different parts of their risk as well.

One of those, which may have been flagged already, is the idea around ESG long-term value strategies, the environmental, social, and governance piece around that, and these are important considerations that we have to make and have to think about. First of all, if insurance companies are unwilling to cover the liability of a company in the first place, then, really, should we be getting in the business or allowing companies to ensure that risk, which has already been denied getting coverage by other companies? It's an important question, I think. We have to ensure that we don't find ourselves in situations like we have potentially around abandoned oil wells. Again, that sort of liability happens for a variety of reasons, but at the end of the day we need to ensure that if we are going to allow this to take place, it's not going to be Albertans that are on the hook, it's not going to find us in a position where we have to cover these costs in the long term. That's always a concern.

Again, I'm very interested to hear more comments from the government. I also think that there are important conversations that are necessary – and, again, why I am supporting the amendment to move this to committee, to refer this to committee – specifically around how the Ministry of Finance is going to handle some of the very important questions that are involved in what we are seeing here around captive insurance in Bill 76, specifically some of those questions being: how is the government planning to monitor the level of risk? We've seen in other jurisdictions – I think specifically in Vermont – a captive insurance model in place for quite some

time. I would also ask the minister potentially where this captive insurance idea is coming from, if there are specific models that the minister is looking to replicate or take pieces from. Those are important questions that I have.

How is the government going to monitor the level of risk? Again, we're talking about companies that may have been denied insurance for a variety of reasons from the traditional market at this point, and now we're saying that they should be allowed to either insure themselves or a third party should be able to insure that company. Again, this might be a good idea. It seems like it's been working in other jurisdictions, but when we look specifically to how the government is going to monitor this level of risk, the extensive power that we're offering to the minister's office and the superintendent of insurance, I mean, we need answers for these questions before we can fully support what we're seeing here in Bill 76.

An important conversation that has come up again and again is what we saw within senior management at AIMCo and the board putting a level of risk tolerance that was devastating and cost Albertans or the people that were part of that fund billions of dollars. The last thing we want to do is see more situations like that, where we are maybe not properly assessing the risk that is going to be taken and at the end of the day it's Albertans and people part of those funds that get hit. That's the last thing we should want.

Again, concerns around staffing levels in the ministry's office and the ability to implement these changes, to assess the risk, to ensure that the requirements that we are putting in place are stringent enough and that the evaluations that are happening after the fact are stringent enough and that we are ensuring that if changes need to be made, they are being done on a regular basis, not that we put this in place and forget about it and let these companies, you know, do what they want until we finally see, again in the story that we've seen from AIMCo, where it's too late to save that money and to come back from that risk.

Again, when we look at this legislation and the idea of creating captive insurance companies, these are wholly owned subsidiaries, in many cases, of a parent company whose exclusive role is to self-insure. We see this in other jurisdictions covering a variety of industries. Whether we are talking about – you know, the energy industry has come up a lot through these debates, automotive industry, telecommunications, technology companies in general, retail, manufacturing, health care. The list is long. I would be interested to hear from the minister or from somebody in cabinet who they expect, I guess, first of all, to be the largest participant of this captive insurance industry but also a list of who else they think might take part as well.

3:20

You know, if we consider health care, it wasn't long ago when this government passed legislation to potentially and arguably raise the threshold of what might be considered a liability or gross negligence when it comes to long-term care facilities. This is an important conversation, especially as we continue through the pandemic. We have this government changing thresholds on liabilities on certain industries or certain sectors within our province, and now we are going to allow them to potentially have captive insurance to cover their own liabilities.

There are a lot of changes happening. I'm not saying that in this instance they're necessarily the wrong decisions. I think that it's quite likely necessary that we move in this direction, but we must always consider what kind of risk we are going to allow to take on, ensuring, again, that the rules that are put in place are not going to find us in the situation like we've seen with abandoned oil wells, where hundreds of millions of dollars of liability are left to taxpayers, are left to municipalities or any organization across the

province. When we talk about a company being able to insure their own liability, that seems to be a real concern in terms of if they were to go bankrupt, ensuring that they have the capital to cover those liabilities and so forth. We've seen examples of where this might be necessary.

The risks seem to continue to pile on, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we have to always be ready to manage this and to assess the risk, whether we're talking about, you know, insurance market cycles, whether we're looking at financial incentives for lost control or flexibility in managing risk. I mean, these are all reasons why something like Bill 76 around captive insurance might be necessary, but I truly believe that we need more time to discuss this. I think that through the briefing process during the technical briefing with Treasury Board and Finance there was no commitment that any new staff are going to be employed or any new staff will be brought into the ministry to ensure that Bill 76 and the process of Captive Insurance Companies Act being implemented is – there needs to be extra staff, I would say. We need to ensure that there are people monitoring these situations and this type of legislation at all times. I'm concerned when we talk about taking on something so substantive as we're seeing in Bill 76 without any commitment from the ministry for extra eyes and extra expertise on such an important issue.

Again, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, I have to reflect on the comments from the member that we just heard, that in a lot of instances while the idea or the principle of the bills that we're seeing brought forward, we're likely able to support them; unfortunately, we've seen far too many times a government that has said one thing and done another or potentially had an idea that was good in principle but after implementing it, it did not necessarily do what we expected it to do or do what was best for Albertans. We saw this when the government made the decision to remove the 5 per cent cap on auto insurance, and we've seen since that process took place that Albertans have been slammed with auto insurance premiums going up year after year for a couple of years now. And, of course, this government took further action to increase the profitability of insurance companies specific to personal liability in the automobile sector, and unfortunately none of those profits that have been realized by those companies have necessarily trickled down to Albertans, which is so unfortunate.

When we make these decisions that are changing important parts of our system, we need to ensure that at the end of the day it is supporting regular Albertans, not necessarily supporting... [interjection] Oh. I see an interjection, so I will take that.

Thank you.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-West Henday who raised some, I think, pertinent questions, valuable questions, but also made some, I think, inaccurate comparisons. With respect to the question, and a good question, of who will benefit from this captives legislation, I would say, obviously, energy companies. A number of them who already have captives that are domiciled offshore would be beneficiaries. I can say that there's interest from Alberta Health Services around the utilization of a captive. Certainly, the automobile dealers' association, the Alberta Forest Products Association are trade associations that have shown great interest. I believe that there will be great benefit to a large variety of organizations and entities within Alberta.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you. I appreciate that interjection and some clarification on some instances that we could see in the minister's opinion benefiting Albertans or organizations within

Alberta. I think it's interesting that the minister pointed out the idea of AHS being able to, you know, use – the idea of captive insurance: I don't necessarily know that it's right or wrong. I'd definitely need more conversation on that, which is again why I would support seeing this referred to a committee, but when we get into talking about government agencies being able to access captive insurance, I think that is a whole other piece that we need to consider and identify any concerns or opportunities there as well.

Again, I think that when we look at other jurisdictions that have implemented the idea of captive insurance, there are opportunities there to support companies that are finding it harder and harder to gain access to insurance as the market continues to change for a variety of reasons, but we must every step of the way do our best to assess that risk and to ensure that if another company, an insurance company is not willing to provide insurance for these companies in the first place, we are truly evaluating whether it's in our best interest to allow somebody else to do that, to allow a company to insure themselves. It's an interesting conversation, and hopefully we will have the government get on board and support the idea of moving this to referral. Obviously, we will have to wait and see how they feel about that, and I look forward to hearing from them on that.

You know, we've seen, as the previous member mentioned, gambling decisions made by this government that were essentially gambles specific to the Keystone XL pipeline, and I would hate to see that type of gamble continue on through legislation like Bill 76. We must do everything we can to ensure that those risks are assessed, and it really doesn't seem like in that case that did happen. If this government is willing to take risky bets like that – and in that case we lost billions and billions of dollars – I would hate to see those gambles continue on, especially when we're talking about things like insuring risk for Alberta companies and for Albertans.

At this point it's truly a little bit hard for me and for my colleagues to trust that this government is going to get it right, which is why it's so important to send this to committee. I think that we need to hear more from TBF officials. I think we need to hear more from industry stakeholders, whether, again, they are in the automotive industry, whether they are in the health care industry, to the specifics around the minister's point around AHS potentially being able to access captive insurance. I think that I would be interested to hear from AHS and other government agencies how they feel captive insurance might benefit them or if there are any concerns with being able to cover their own risk. Again, I appreciate the complexity and the changes that we're seeing to the market and to insurance, whether we are talking about, you know, the fact that cyberterrorism is always a concern, not only for companies but even for our own governments. Again, I look forward to hearing more on this conversation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on REF1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 76, Captive Insurance Companies Act, REF1. We've had an experience in this Chamber of this government putting forward legislation with the caveat: just trust us. You know, we've heard very loud and clear from Albertans that there is trust broken with this government, so I think that when we're talking about pieces of legislation that should have detailed information in them and this government is saying, "We're going to leave it to regulation," there are some concerns.

3:30

There was an opportunity for them to include pieces that speak to the Captive Insurance Companies Act about risk, et cetera. It could have been legislated. It could have been part of this bill, and when it's missing, immediately that's a red flag. We've watched this government make decisions, take extreme risk, and fail. When we put forward our amendment to refer this to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, I think it's an expectation of Albertans to have these conversations in the light of day.

I know that when I was a chair for the Resource Stewardship Committee, we had referrals sent to us from the Chamber to further review legislation that was being proposed, and it was something that we had accepted. The whole purpose of being able to refer a piece of legislation to a committee is to allow the public, those members of the public that are impacted by this, to come and share their stories, to share their insights into this.

We have a government that is saying: just trust us. You know, we haven't seen the list of who they've consulted with. We haven't seen the document of what we heard from those consultations. I think that when we're looking at the potential risk to so many, it's something that should be discussed in committee.

I think that having committees as part of this Legislature is something that is incredibly important to Albertans. It gives Albertans an opportunity to come and speak to the elected officials in a way that isn't a just-trust-us, this-is-what-we-heard sort of way. It allows stakeholders, it allows industry to come forward and bring their concerns. It also gives them an opportunity to say: "You know what? This is a piece of the legislation that we really like, and we need to make sure that this piece stays in there." It gives people in the province the ability to come forward, talk to members of the committee, and highlight their concerns and their ideas when it comes to this legislation.

We've heard that this bill is neither good nor bad. There's the possibility of having profits, but then on the flip side of that, there is the incredible possibility and risk of loss. When we're looking to this government and how they make decisions based on risk, their ability to mitigate risk is somewhat concerning. We saw that directly impacted with their lack of decisions and policy and leadership this summer, when the Premier stood and promised Albertans the best summer ever. What did that mean? Well, as of this summer, for the live music venues that meant that 16 were closed. It meant that they made decisions not based on science, not based on public health officials' recommendations. They didn't have those that were implementing the new restrictions or lack thereof. They didn't have their input.

There were so many venues that came forward and said: we understand that this government is promising the best summer ever, but we have concerns based on science. They weren't at the table when that decision to completely open up this summer was made. So I question who this government is talking to. Why not open it up to Albertans, to the public to have this conversation in the light of day rather than a just-trust-us approach? We've seen over and over the impacts of COVID and the negative impacts that this government's policies have made with their lack of response to supporting small businesses, the arts sector. It's very, very concerning.

What I continue to hear from people all across the province is that their voices aren't being heard, so when we make the request to refer this to committee, this gives this government an opportunity to be open and be transparent and listen to the concerns of people. They're impacted by this. We want to hear the positives and the negatives. There's definitely a need. People are struggling. We've seen small businesses plead with this government to look at

skyrocketing insurance. We've listened to individuals all across the province begging this government to do something about the cost of living, to do something about electricity rates, insurance costs. Why not have those people come to a committee and share their concerns, share their ideas, share their strategies?

We can look at a crossjurisdictional approach and what other provinces have done and what the success has been or lack thereof. If we're doing something that's really going to support Albertans and some of our largest sectors that have truly struggled through this pandemic, shouldn't we be focusing on getting it right? Having it referred to committee gives the opportunity for those stakeholders impacted.

The minister just mentioned that Health was potentially looking at this. I think that when we're talking about health, there's been a very clear record that this government has been damaging to our health care profession, to our health care workers. When we see the bad decisions and policies put forward by this government – and it had such a negative impact on our health care system, where thousands of surgeries had to be cancelled – I think that those in the health system should have a voice at the table. Why not invite them to committee? Have them come and share their experience and their concerns about this risk of loss, their strategies about what they need when it comes to their insurance needs.

I just don't understand the fear of having it brought into the open and having it discussed openly in a committee setting. With all of the amazing technology there's the capability that we can live stream – people can participate via Zoom – so you get to hear from people all over the province and they have the opportunity to speak directly to those elected officials that participate on this committee, who would then do a report and table it in this very place, very open, very transparent. It would allow all Albertans to see how this decision is being made to ensure that this piece of legislation is, in fact, the most supportive and comprehensive and really, really mitigates the risk of loss.

When we talk about the potential of bankruptcy and the impacts that that would have on Albertans that are already struggling, that is a risk that I don't think this government should continue to take. There have been so many missteps where we are seeing the negative impacts over and over and over on Albertans.

I think that by having an opportunity to have those large sectors and stakeholders come and present, it only makes sense. We have another opportunity with this government to legitimately listen to those that are being impacted by the legislation. I hear over and over that individuals, industries, stakeholders weren't consulted with, and when we ask for a referral, that is exactly what this government could do. It gives those individuals an opportunity to come forward and talk about it and perhaps actually put it into the legislation rather than just leaving it for regulation. Again, another "Trust us; we're going to do the right thing," yet it's not a transparent process.

3:40

I think that over the last 20 months, for sure – but I would argue even prior to COVID – this government has shown that they do not know how to manage risk on behalf of Albertans. We saw it with the best summer ever. We saw it with the mishandling of the fourth wave. You know, we had individuals in this government come forward and argue about the effectiveness of vaccines. We had members of this government come forward and argue about the realities of COVID, and we've seen decisions that are simply putting Albertans at risk. We've seen unnecessary risks being taken.

When we're talking about something that very clearly needs to mitigate risk for these companies, it just simply makes sense to refer it to committee, where you can have a robust, transparent, open conversation, hear from those stakeholders and industry sectors that

are really struggling and what their solutions are. I think that we have the ability through committee to really reach to all portions of the province and hear from those individuals and those organizations about what their needs are. It brings it into the light of day, and if there is something that is glaringly, obviously missing from this piece of legislation, it would come forward through that process. That's why we have committees.

I think that those members of this Chamber that sit on that committee are competent and able to ask the questions that perhaps we're asking in the debate right now and can get some clarity on those things, and it would give this government an opportunity to really make sure that the legislation that they're putting forward genuinely supports and helps all of those individuals that are going to be using this and helps mitigate that risk.

I think that when we're talking about financial stressors, we can all say that this pandemic has had a significant impact on Albertans' finances. There has been incredible job loss. There have been costs that continue to go up. When we look at giving some of these sectors some opportunities for alternatives for insurance, I think that that's a good thing, but let's get it right. By having presentations through committee, it just pauses this process a little bit. It opens it up to allow some really, really robust and thoughtful conversations. It provides Albertans an opportunity to ask those questions and to provide clarity about the importance of making sure that this stuff is done in the open, not behind closed doors, not left up to regulation.

There are things that are absolutely essential, and I think that when we're listening to Albertans, we need to make sure that we provide them that opportunity to have their voice heard, to have their opinions about what actually would benefit them when it comes to captive insurance. I would hate to see this piece of legislation going through with some glaring gaps, and when you make a referral to committee, it provides that opportunity to perhaps see those gaps that maybe weren't thought of initially, to look at those unforeseen risks that perhaps were just an oversight. When you have those involved, the stakeholders, come forward and talk about this, it gives an opportunity for this to be changed.

We've seen this government over and over deny any of the amendments that we've put forward, and I know that my colleagues in this Chamber – thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen to join debate on REF1.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and to speak to the referral to Resource Stewardship in relation to Bill 76. You know, I think that I have some questions, and I'm hoping that a minister would be able to maybe answer them.

This is why I think it's important that this bill be referred, just to clarify and to make sure that Albertans understand the level of risk that is being taken on through this model. Now, we know that in regulation the Minister of Finance will have the opportunity to set the level of risk, but when we look at the industries that he has specifically spoken about, we also know that there is substantial liability associated with some of those industries when it comes to the capital investment and the feasibility of whether or not some of the risk that would be associated with these insurance programs could potentially end up failing. We haven't really heard from the minister as to how those regulations are going to be set, how he's going to determine what the thresholds are going to be, and then what the response by the province would be if any of these companies would perhaps fail.

Now, I also think that there's a piece of this legislation that requires a pretty substantial piece of education to it so that the industries that have been focused on have an understanding of how this can be set up and how it's going to be managed and then how we're going to ensure that there's no liability back on the province, because we know that it has to be monitored by the province. Treasury Board and Finance has a responsibility to make sure that when these insurance programs are set up, they're being done within the layouts of the law and that the liability component isn't at such a level that ultimately the province would become responsible for having to have to manage it.

I have some questions around that. I don't think we've had a lot of clarity around it, and I find it interesting that the minister has highlighted forestry as an area that's interested in this, oil and gas as an area that's interested but also agriculture.

Now, my focus first would be, of course, on oil and gas. If we have a company that does decide to adopt this model who is the parent company, who then creates their own insurance program so that they're able to offset some of the liabilities around their insurance, my question would then be: what happens if the price of oil drops and some of these companies become insolvent? How will this be addressed under this current structure? Who is then responsible for those liabilities, and how is that, then, insurance paid out to a company that may or may no longer exist? Is it something similar to what we're seeing right now, which is that we have some companies that will become insolvent, will shut down operations, and then transfer whatever remaining assets over to a new company? Does that insurance then under the parent company also get transferred over to the secondary or the new developed company?

Ultimately and typically, insurance wouldn't be able to be transferred that way. The intent of it would be that the insurance company that would be existing would then have some protection and would be paying out the liabilities on some of those assets, but if the parent company no longer exists, does the insurance company continue to be able to operate? We haven't heard that from the minister. It is primarily the whole intent of this piece of legislation to allow that to happen, so it's a pretty risky investment, I would say, when it comes to having a parent company creating their own insurance programs.

You know, we know that part of the reason why this conversation has to happen and why this legislation is being introduced by the government is because the market has become hard when it comes to certain pieces of insurance. We know it is when it comes to catastrophic losses. We also know in energy it's become more around the ESG considerations, and it's led to a permanent withdrawal of insurance supply in the market when it comes specifically to oil and gas.

3:50

So if we know already that the market is hard in those two areas yet this piece of legislation is supposed to address that and it's specific to oil and gas, I guess, what is Treasury Board and Finance going to do to make sure that when a market is already saying that there is such a liability that they don't want to be insuring these products that the province is also going to be protected and going to be able to monitor and ensure that we're not creating insurance pieces under parent companies that are already so significant that the insurance market already doesn't want to ensure them because the liability is so high? I guess my question to the Minister of Finance would be: how is he going to ensure under regulation that the threshold risk isn't set to such a high level that ultimately we're creating almost a false market and that we're jeopardizing the

insurance structure within Alberta underneath this model? [interjection] I'll give way.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, thank you for the question. I love to get up and talk about Alberta's incredibly responsible energy industry. I believe Alberta has been unfairly targeted by, certainly, some interests globally, and that is one reason why insurance capacity has pulled away from the Alberta energy industry. That's one reason why we believe it's important to set up captives not only for the Alberta energy industry. It will be beneficial much more broadly, but to the Alberta energy industry it could be critically important as the industry has been unfairly targeted through ESG. Again, we're the most responsible industry in the world. Some would characterize us as not that way, unfairly so. As insurance capacity pulls back, we need a made-in-Alberta solution. Captive insurance is part of that solution.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Minister, and I appreciate the willingness to go back and forth.

I think we'll pivot a little bit maybe away from oil and gas and talk about agriculture. If we're looking at the fact that agriculture has also been an area that's been identified within this legislation as an area that may benefit from this market and this ability to create captive insurance, I guess my question is – and again, this hasn't really been discussed very much and another reason why maybe it should go back to committee so that we can make sure Albertans understand how the structure would work. But the province already has a responsibility when it comes to agriculture insurance. They have it through AFSC. To see the industry being a potential option to create insurance underneath this model – I guess my question would be: why would that be necessary under this structure? Why would a parent company under agriculture need to create a secondary insurance recognizing catastrophic losses when we have a BRM model and we have AFSC?

We could argue that maybe we need to be looking at the AFSC model and saying that there may be some improvements that could be required to support agriculture. Sure. But it's a provincial program. If there is an understanding by Treasury Board and Finance to say that agriculture could benefit from this, there is a need here for a potential insurance program for, let's say, catastrophic loss, so drought for example, why would the government feel that they need to be able to create a captive insurance model for the industry when the AFSC already exists? [intervention] Yeah, I'll give way.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I would suggest that AFSC likely doesn't need a captive to function well. In fact, I would suggest that the way AFSC functions with producers, the federal government, and the provincial government all contributing premiums to build a fund, a capital fund, that can be used to pay out ultimately insurance claims by Alberta farmers and ranchers during times of loss is a very similar model to that of a captive insurance model. Short answer to the question: I don't believe AFSC would utilize a captive. Of course, the option would be there. I believe the system they've got in place right now is serving the purposes of farmers and ranchers effectively today.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Minister, and I appreciate the comment. It's just that in the release by the government agriculture is highlighted as one of the industries that could potentially use this model. I guess if it wasn't under AFSC, I mean, maybe it would be an industry deciding that they wanted to create their own system. Fair enough. If that's the case, then I would be interested to see the structure of how that would work, which, again, would be something why maybe Resource Stewardship could look at that.

You know, maybe it is something where we need to be looking at the fact that livestock producers may want to be able to create a captive model when it comes to supply chain issues and not being able to get product to market, feed loss, access to water, those kinds of things. It could work, I guess.

Again, it's my understanding of: what is the necessity behind needing to do it under the structure? And I'm not saying that – we know that the captive insurance model exists in other provinces, we know it exists in the United States, so obviously it has worked in some of those jurisdictions. It was just a curiosity that I had given that we do have a structure of AFSC, but we also have an industry that's been highlighted within the government's rationale as to why we would do this. Again, I think the questions that we have are not necessarily about the captive model and the context of the structure of it but why the industries would necessarily need the access to it.

Oil and gas I understand. I mean, there's the ESG issue and things like that. But when we're seeing agriculture and forestry being highlighted, I guess the curiosity for me would be: what are the barriers right now? If it's catastrophic loss, if that's the primary driver for forestry and agriculture, then maybe it is something where we need to start looking at how insurance is being offered through the program that currently exists. If they're not meeting the demand yet they're being provided through the province, then there might be a gap there.

Again, when I also hear the minister talking about Alberta Health Services, I wonder why Alberta Health Services would also need to be looking at a captive model for insurance programs when we have Blue Cross. Blue Cross is already able to offer those insurance premiums and be able to offer, I mean, I would say, a pretty stable insurance program at this point. Again, it doesn't really speak to where the market is hard when we start looking at health insurance given that it's a pretty big market.

These are just honest questions, and I think, you know, as we move through debate, they would be things that I'd be more than interested to continue to have the conversation with the minister about.

But at this moment I think I will sit down, and I look forward to future debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on REF1. I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are back on second reading of the bill proper, Bill 76, Captive Insurance Companies Act. Are there any members wishing to join debate?

All right. The hon. member to close. I see the hon. Minister of Finance has risen to close debate.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to close debate. In a hard insurance market, an insurance market that's very difficult, where we see capacity being pulled back in a number of ways and premiums going up – and this is a phenomenon that's occurring right across the country, in fact, right across the western world to some degree. But in that kind of insurance market enabling captives, allowing captives to be domiciled here in the province of Alberta I believe will provide a critical solution for some entities here in the province. It has potential to improve the competitiveness of Alberta businesses and industries and even sectors. At a time when we're looking to attract a disproportionate amount of investment back into this province and grow this economy, competitiveness is critical. So, again, I'm pleased to bring this bill forward, and I look forward to support from all members in this House.

[Motion carried; Bill 76 read a second time]

4:00

Bill 82
Mineral Resource Development Act

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

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act.

The proposed legislation is the first step in implementing Alberta's modern mineral strategy and action plan. We're taking a multipronged approach to diversifying our energy sector. This includes leveraging Alberta's natural geological advantages, a strong investment climate, and a skilled workforce, and with that we're launching a new mineral strategy.

Our government developed Renewing Alberta's Mineral Future, which outlines our plans to meet the increasing global demand for critical and rare-earth minerals, and it shows how our mineral sector both continues to strengthen and diversify Alberta's economy over the long term. This is in part because critical minerals such as lithium, vanadium, uranium, and rare-earth elements are used world-wide to manufacture batteries, electronics, and infrastructure for renewable energy. Many of the minerals identified in the mineral strategy are essential to support our energy future and to advance the adoption of a low-carbon economy.

Our strategy was developed with the recommendation and guidance from the Mineral Advisory Council and with input from various stakeholders, including First Nations and Métis Albertans. It was informed by our work with federal and provincial governments across Canada.

The strategy lays out six key areas to support and achieve Alberta's vision. This includes increasing public geoscience, enhancing the fiscal and regulatory environment, promoting responsible development, advancing opportunities for Indigenous peoples, developing public awareness and a skilled workforce, and promoting innovation and industrial development.

To help address the second area, which is to enhance the fiscal and regulatory environment, our government is proposing legislation to enact regulatory changes. Currently regulatory oversight for minerals is split among multiple entities in the province, including Alberta Environment and Parks, the Alberta Energy Regulator, the NRCB, and Aboriginal consultation office, among others.

If passed, Bill 82 would establish the Alberta Energy Regulator as the full life cycle regulator from exploration through reclamation, and this will be for metallic and industrial minerals, including lithium, vanadium, and many other critical and rare-earth minerals. Doing this will consolidate regulatory oversight and assign that responsibility to one entity.

Specific sections in the act are devoted to the development of mineral resources through wells, facilities, and schemes such as brine-hosted minerals as well as through mines, mine sites, and processing plants such as hardrock minerals.

The bill will provide the government and the AER with authority, including regulation-making and rule-making authority for liability management. Finally, the bill outlines broad regulation-making authorities for reserve to cabinet to ensure alignment with government policy and general oversight as well as rule-making powers for the AER over the development of mineral resources. Specifically, the sections detail broad and specific rule-making powers related to resource management and life cycle regulation.

The proposed regulation also includes consequential related amendments to support implementation, including the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, the Pipeline Act, and Geothermal Resource Development Act.

Additional amendments are needed for the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to define the definition of "well." Additional amendments are needed for the Responsible Energy Development Act, REDA, to amend the mandate of the AER as the full life cycle regulator, and amendments are needed for the Natural Resources Conservation Board Act to remove the mandate of that agency over mineral resources and move its public interest decision-making role over to the AER.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation and amendments are designed to guide the responsible management and development of the province's mineral resources. We'll continue to evaluate our strategy, policy, and regulations to respond to these types of emerging issues and new development opportunities as the sector evolves, and we'll be guided by the key areas and action items outlined in the strategy. This is just the first step towards implementing the mineral strategy and action plan. I hope that all members in this House will help me in moving forward with Bill 82.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act. What I am about to say may shock a lot of people, but I think that this bill is probably good.

Much like the bill that we just talked about, I sort of think the first bar for any piece of legislation is: is this an answer to a problem that exists? In this case it is an answer to a problem that exists. It is currently very challenging for us to develop these resources because the regulations we have currently sort of require multiple windows, and they require companies to get probably larger tenure than they need under the oil and gas system because of, you know, the location in brine. So this is a good thing. It's a good thing that will allow this industry to develop. That is definitely excellent.

Now, this is the first time that this bill is being discussed in this House, so no one on either side of the House is likely to be surprised to hear that I have a number of questions. I think one of the first questions I have – this is going to the AER to sort of deal with these issues; they will be the regulator. That in and of itself, I think, makes sense. One of the concerns I would say I have about that is that we're putting sort of more work on the AER, and they were already reduced in 2019. I believe they went from about 1,200 employees to about 900 employees. They have fewer people regulating the same number of things, and now they have fewer people regulating more things, so I have some concern about their ability to handle that work or whether there will be sort of staffing up occurring in order to allow this to occur.

Obviously, a large sort of portion of the substance of how this is going to work has yet to be developed. The AER will ultimately write the rules that will allow them to adjudicate between interests because unlike geothermal, where the tenure flows with other mineral tenures, this will be a different tenure. If you want to extract oil and gas and this, I understand that you will have to have separate tenures, so potentially you have multiple entities with rights in the same sort of possible area. The AER will need to write rules around that. That's not actually atypical; that's how it works with most things. That's sort of the normal process, so I think that's not a huge concern. It is an outstanding concern. It is something that I think that we will be watching for and Albertans will be watching for to

sort of see how that progresses, but I don't think it's necessarily a strike against the bill.

I'm hoping that we will hear sort of whether there will be additional people to handle the additional work. This will roll it into the AER as the regulator for a number of things, but there are, I think, some concerns with the AER now. I sit on a legislative committee, so nothing super secret or anything, that is dealing with issues arising from the AER in large part. It's essentially dealing with rural property rights, but one of the sort of primary rural property rights related concerns relates to the way the AER handles cleanup and certificates and kind of who has a right to go before them on what matters. There are a lot of rural Albertans out there who own land who feel that the way this process works currently is imperfect, to say the least.

4:10

I mean, the challenge is that you sort of have the Surface Rights Board and you have the AER, and the Surface Rights Board tends to defer on certain issues to determinations that the AER has made, and these landowners that we have been hearing from feel that the AER doesn't do a great job, and then they don't get to have it adjudicated at the surface rights, for good reasons. Normally when these sorts of entities interact, we like to make sure that only one entity has carriage of a certain issue. Otherwise, you could have different people determining different things, and that would be very problematic. I think we're hopeful to see what the resolution to that will be because presumably if the regulations are the same for these entities, those problems will potentially reoccur. I think, you know, we need to take those concerns seriously. I'm not saying that they're easy to address, I'm not suggesting that I have special insight into what the solution is, but I do hope that that committee will do its work well and will address those issues and that that work will apply to this and to other issues. So that's another thing.

In addition, what the act doesn't address – and hopefully the minister is able to address this. I suspect an answer; I just don't know. The AER regulates a lot of developments – it'll regulate this development – but it doesn't regulate them for all purposes. The Aboriginal consultation office, which is within Indigenous Relations, sort of does some work with respect to whether consultation with Indigenous people who have rights to the area has been done correctly. It doesn't seem – my recollection from my time in government is that neither side was particularly happy with the way that went. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that the process is wrong, but it does mean that there are concerns that should be addressed, and there were concerns sort of on both sides.

What this bill doesn't say is how Indigenous consultation will occur. I think that that is a very important issue to be addressed because presumably the right to that consultation will be the same. The potential impacts on Indigenous rights will continue to exist with this process, as it does with other processes, so it's important to know that those concerns will be heard, that they will be addressed. Now, I would suspect that, much like the AER requires sort of a certificate from the Aboriginal consultation office on oil and gas projects, the same will go here. I just don't know. I think that that is something that I would like to hear an answer to because it is certainly an issue that has to be addressed.

If it isn't addressed, it's bad for the Indigenous groups and potentially the environment, but if it's not addressed, it's also bad for the companies because that means that rather than having a process to go through, there's a potential constitutional challenge, which leads to an enormous amount of delay. We all know that investment loves delay and risk. That was sarcastic, I guess. Maybe if things are going to be on the record, I should point that out. Otherwise, it may appear that I think that. Tone doesn't translate to

text exceptionally well. Let's put it that way. Yeah. It's important that there be a process for this because no one benefits from a process that is unclear and uncertain.

Those are the majority, I think, of the questions that I have around this bill. I mean, in general I think it's a good step in the right direction. I don't know, and maybe the minister does know. Maybe she's . . . [interjection] Oh. I don't know if there are interventions on – I'll look to the Speaker. There are not. Okay. Thanks. It's a new process still, so we're all still figuring it out.

Now I've lost my train of thought.

It is an important step forward. I don't know that we have sort of a full understanding of how much of these resources we have, but this is a really good opportunity for diversification here in Alberta. It is a really good opportunity for us to move into another energy sector.

Currently it's my understanding that a lot of the production, particularly of lithium, is based in China. One of the challenges with having all of the production coming from one company, especially when it's production of something that's basically critical for the way we live our lives currently, is that if they decide that they don't want to sell to us, that's a really big problem. We don't want that to happen, so this is, I think, a very important – I don't want to understate, by asking questions, the importance of taking this step forward to regulate so that companies can begin to explore this possibility and can begin to attract investment, can begin to grow jobs, and can begin to take the necessary steps forward so that we can have this sort of development here in Alberta. Yeah. Knowing that it's done well and knowing what all the ins and outs of the process are is going to be important.

I think that, you know, generally as we move forward, we're likely to be supportive of this for exactly that reason, because this is in large part what we need here in Alberta. We need to see more investment. We need to see industries coming back and new industries coming in. The people, certainly, that I talk to here in Alberta: their sort of primary concern right now is about having jobs and being able to pay their mortgages, and their very basic concern is about being able to afford housing and food and insurance and that sort of thing. Anything that can contribute to economic growth will likely help that.

That being said, as we set up a new process, we want to be sure that we're doing it well. I think both sides agree that we have a significant problem with a lack of reclamation of wells and those wells sort of being still on people's land. Now, both sides have sort of, I think, made attempts to kind of move forward and start cleaning that up, but it is a big problem that continues to exist in Alberta, and what we definitely don't want to do is contribute to the growth of that problem. As we move forward, we want to ensure that, you know, we sort of have the right policies and procedures and rules and requirements in place to ensure that we don't see that problem continue to grow. I think that as we see companies able to secure investment for this, it probably helps. As the price of oil goes up, it helps because as there's sort of more money in the space, there's more ability to deal with these past liabilities.

Yeah. I think those are my questions. I'm generally sort of prepared to say that this is probably a good step. This is probably a step in the right direction. I hope very much that we will see answers to those questions going forward, and I hope that this moves quickly so that we are able to begin attracting this investment because it will be to the benefit of us all.

I'm hopeful as well that we'll hear that there will be some sort of additional personnel at the AER to handle these additional applications although, I mean, the government may be able to provide us with estimates on how many applications we're expecting to see going forward. I don't know. Yeah. I don't want to hazard a

guess in the absence of information as to how many applications there will be. I assume that they have done the work to determine kind of how much work that will generate and how many people will be there.

I guess that's why they give the minister the opportunity to close debate on these sorts of things, because we all say our many, many questions and then, you know, afterwards the minister is able to answer those. Or we'll go to Committee of the Whole, where everybody gets to talk a whole bunch and potentially answer and ask and whatever a whole bunch of questions.

I guess, with that, I will close and say that I think this is a step in the right direction. I'm glad to be involved in, shall we say, a rare moment of concurrence. It's kind of nice that that happens around here occasionally. I look forward with interest to the sort of additional details and answers to those questions.

Thank you very much.

4:20

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Airdrie-East. Ah, whatever you are. Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As much as I do appreciate the hon. Member for Airdrie-East, I do represent Lethbridge-East.

I thank the member previous for some of her thoughts and comments and echo some of her questions. I hope that we'll hear some of that debate as we go on this afternoon.

Where I wanted to start was imagining a future, if you will, Mr. Speaker, of a world far from here with untold secrets and minerals and resources that we'd like to look into, and we could, just for interest's sake, call that world Pandora. If we were to go there and to find that there were minerals and resources that were of great value to us, we'd need to mine them, and they could be something. Because it's so far away, we could call it unobtainium or something like that. We may find on that world that there is an indigenous population. Again, we could give them a name, the Na'vi or something of that nature, and find out that that was already imagined. That future was imagined. If only James Cameron had had legislation like this in Bill 82, they may not have had a fantastic movie like *Avatar*, and they may have in fact averted many of the crises that we found throughout that movie.

I do believe that, as the member previous had stated and the minister stated, this is a great place to start in understanding the responsibilities of the future and understanding what we do need to do to create a framework for developing these resources, developing these industries, seeking these minerals, and providing the parameters with which we will undertake those endeavours. I'm pleased that, from my understanding, from the minister's work through her ministry, as a part of the targeted engagement for the mineral strategy and action plan Alberta Energy engaged specifically on the elements of the strategy – the life cycle, mineral regulation, and the tenure of that modernization – through an online survey, through virtual round-tables and, specifically, written submissions with Indigenous organizations, which I was very happy to hear. They also engaged with industry, investment stakeholders, landowners, academia throughout the province, and government stakeholders.

I think that again speaks to some of what the previous member was asking. I'm glad that that was a great start and is building to provide this framework so that the future that we're talking about is done in a way where we can avoid, though I used some humour at the beginning of my talking points, a very actual reality that could happen when you don't take that time to consider those possibilities. I'm very pleased that the minister has taken the time to do that work, to provide a map, if you will, of the future moving forward.

Some of the other reasons we need this kind of legislation are to increase public geoscience. I'd actually like the minister to describe further what that definition actually means as that's a little bit of foreign language to myself. I would look forward to that in the upcoming debate.

Enhance the fiscal and regulatory environment: I think that, again, is just a very needed outline and parameter for what we want to see here.

Promote responsible development: again, a foundation of many governments and of Alberta in general is that we do this responsibly. We have a strong world-wide reputation for ethical and responsible and social development of our resources, and we want to continue that reputation.

Advance opportunities for Indigenous peoples: again, a very key stakeholder group, a group that we need to work with and develop their best futures with along with those of other Albertans.

Develop public awareness and a skilled workforce: again, providing hope and a future for many of our students, attracting people from all across Canada and hopefully around the world to come and work in a burgeoning and new industry.

Promote innovation and industrial development: something that many countries around the world are seeking to do to better the lives and lifestyles of their citizens and the people that live, work, and play within the province of Alberta, which is our purview.

I'm very glad that this legislation has been brought forward in such a manner. That's why I stand today to speak in favour of Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act. This bill is the first step in implementing Alberta's modern mineral strategy and action plan, helping to ensure the responsible management and development of our province's mineral resources. Alberta is blessed with so many diverse resources. From our energy industry, our agricultural industry, to our forestry industry, Alberta has a diverse and bountiful natural resource sector as well. As Albertans we pride ourselves on what these resources bring, but we also pride ourselves on responsible and sustainable development.

With that pride in mind, I'm excited to see this bill give proper attention to all the minerals Alberta has within its boundaries. For far too long Alberta has not fully recognized the abundance of critical and rare-earth minerals that we possess. For the most part, the focus has been on energy-related minerals – oil, natural gas, and even coal – as these are the most demanded and most beneficial resources to invest in and protect. This is not such a bad thing as it is a conscious realization of the limitations of past policies and how we need to address and protect all minerals Alberta has to offer as we move forward. The oil and gas industry is critical to Alberta's economy and has employed hundreds of thousands of Albertans, lifting communities out of poverty, and ensuring energy security for Alberta and Canada and, in fact, many places around the world. These aspects were essential years ago and are just as important now; however, we are including and prioritizing all minerals in Alberta, an inclusion that I think is long overdue.

If passed, the Mineral Resource Development Act will make the Alberta Energy Regulator the full life cycle regulator for Alberta's mineral resources, from exploration to reclamation. Placing the AER in this position will help provide certainty for the industry, help position the province as a preferred mineral producer, and expand growth within this mineral sector. This legislation will provide the AER with the legislative authority to regulate mineral resources. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation would align the AER's authority over minerals with its authority over other energy resources. [interjection] I will make way.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, hon. member, and I appreciate you giving way. I just have a quick question around when it comes to

the AER and the regulator. Obviously, the AER is able to set the regulation and the rules in relation to the minerals. What we've seen historically is that those regulations and those rules can change depending on whether or not someone has filed for an intervenor status or they're looking at their land rights or things like that. I guess I'm just curious if you've heard anything from your colleagues in the government around how they're going to ensure that the rules and regulations that are being set underneath this new piece of legislation are not then going to be changed in six months or in a year as people start accessing their rights to minerals and that the goalposts don't continuously keep changing under the AER.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for that intervention. I think that's actually a very timely question. I think that is something that will have to be considered, and I hope that throughout the debate in this House some of that will be clarified in the legislation as well as, as the member very rightly points out, in the regulations so that we have a stable, thought-through, and recognized future for the industry so that they have that certainty and, in fact, all Albertans have a certainty that the goalposts are what the goalposts are.

Now, that is not likely to be absolute. I think it would be rightly responsible for any government to understand the limitation of what they can see into the future. I would hope that we would be able to resolve every potential circumstance, but I think it's also wise to understand that there could be a circumstance that was unforeseen at the time and to allow some of that leeway and flexibility. I, too, appreciate the member opposite bringing those questions up and look forward to the minister possibly speaking more directly to some of those questions as debate continues. Bill 82 is part of a broad critical and rare-earth mineral strategy called renewing Alberta's mineral future, so hopefully, again, some of those questions and considerations were thought through and discussed at that time.

4:30

It is also a key pillar of Alberta's recovery plan that gives us a path to fully utilize Alberta's mineral resource potential, helping us meet the increasing demand for certain minerals, create jobs, and attract investment in this growing sector. This strategy showcases the incredible investment potential within Alberta's critical and rare-earth mineral sector and lays out clear steps for the province to capitalize on its potential. At the same time, the strategy plays an integral part in Alberta's recovery plan by leveraging the province's natural geological advantages, business excellence, skilled workforce, and Indigenous participation in the natural resource economy. The mineral strategy focuses on critical and strategic minerals such as lithium, uranium, vanadium, rare-earth elements, potash, and diamonds, most of which align with Canada's critical mineral lists and are in high demand in world markets.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

As you get into the specific minerals in this plan, I would like to pause for a moment and reiterate a very significant point for my constituents and other Albertans. Coal development is not included in the mineral strategy, full stop. The province's long-term approach to coal development will be informed by recommendations from the independent Coal Policy Committee already in place.

The mineral strategy and action plan outlines how the province can meet the increasing demand for critical and rare-earth minerals. The action plan includes short-, intermediate-, and long-term actions needed to address the six action areas to support and achieve Alberta's vision, which I read earlier.

Mr. Speaker, we have an exciting future ahead of us with this strategy and this bill. The World Bank has predicted a 500 per cent increase by 2050 in minerals, such as graphite, lithium, and cobalt, needed to feed clean energy demand around the world. Alberta has a very promising geological potential across the province for nonenergy minerals, many of which have been identified as critical and strategic in many plans. We are investing in an exciting new chapter in Alberta's natural resource industry, and I'm extremely excited that we'll be able to safely and efficiently bring these products to market. Alberta has so much to offer in terms of natural resources. I can't wait to see what this next chapter holds, even if it isn't on Pandora seeking unobtainium.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe the individual who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 82 and to the Minister of Energy as well for bringing this forward. Before I get started, I just wanted to send all my love to folks in B.C. and those who are caught over there. It's been quite a few days over there, and I just wanted to say that in session.

A couple of things that I want to talk about. One of the things that was most exciting when I was reading about Bill 82 and in speaking to the ministry is that this is part of a clear energy transition, a clean energy transition, and it's one of the most wonderful opportunities to see where environment and energy are aligned and come together. The minister has done a tremendous amount of work on, like, being able to bring forward that the minerals are such a humongous part of wind turbines and electric vehicles and cellphones, the things that we use every single day, and that's why they call them critical minerals, because they're absolutely necessary for our everyday lives and what we do as part of that. Mr. Speaker, there are many, many complex links between the transformation, that is happening right now, of the energy sector and also to really be able to promote the responsible and sustainable development of these minerals, which is some of the really important information that is in this bill.

One of those things that we talked about earlier today was hydrogen. Also, something that had come up earlier was talking about ESG and the importance of the long-term value strategies. Mr. Speaker, that is where this really becomes a very important point of why this strategy is necessary. If you think about distribution right now – the member has spoken about it earlier, with China – China actually has 80 per cent of the market with respect to lithium. We have a tremendous opportunity with our resources here to be able to corner the market, as the minister says quite often, in rare-earth minerals and in this particular spectrum. It leads to opportunities in vehicle production, battery-making, renewable energy systems, and tech manufacturing. If you look at what's happening right now, many folks were speaking today to the incredible advancements that are happening in the province right now and the uptick on that and the ability to be able to have this market and to be able to move forward.

There were some questions, too, around potential job increases and what that would look like in terms of numbers. It's a bit early, I think, probably, to talk about the scope of what the exact impact would be, but if you look at the federal overall strategy and current scope right now, there's about \$48 billion net worth in Canada right now for the various minerals – I think it's 60 minerals – that are being produced here. The sector includes mining and processing

and manufacturing, and right now there's direct employment of almost 400,000 people in this sector.

One of the more exciting things was that the exports of the minerals have reached \$106 billion. That's 19 per cent of the total merchandise export in the country, and that was with a \$2.3 billion investment, just to give some numbers and some ideas of what we're looking at here with respect to this strategy. Again, I'm so proud of our minister for being able to bring this forward, because it's not an easy thing to be able to align these.

There were some questions, too, around the AER being responsible for the overseeing of this and making sure that those regulations are being followed through. It's absolutely imperative, especially when it comes to mining, that those regulatory – we have the best regulations in the world when it comes to resource development, and I suspect that this bill that is coming forward is going to be following in those footsteps as far as responsible resource development.

There have been quite a few companies, I think, that are very, very interested in this, and as we look at our recovery and our relaunch, as we move through the fourth wave and whatever is going to be expected with future waves of COVID, it is incredible to be able to see opportunity even in the midst of the crisis that we've all been in and to see the opportunities where Alberta is going to be attracting incredible investment.

Another really interesting piece of this, actually, is that there's already refinery capacity here in the province. Sherritt's Fort Saskatchewan refinery treats imported feeds to produce high-purity nickel and cobalt powders. Also – this one was really interesting – there's a magnesium refinery in Exshaw, Alberta. For those of you who have any tummy troubles or anything like that, it's a very, very important part of the puzzle. I know that that probably doesn't seem as important, but if magnesium oxide was just used to treat conditions like heartburn and indigestion, those things are happening right here in our province. That's important for me, so I thought it was an interesting piece to play along with all of the other incredible pieces that are coming along with this.

The other thing I wanted to expand on that other MLAs had spoken about was the critical importance in economic growth, the deployment of the clean energy technologies – especially as the world is shifting towards lower carbon economies, to be able to understand the importance of these minerals and the rare-earth metals and the part that they play in that shift to low-carbon economies cannot be underestimated. It's absolutely imperative that it's part of the discussion right from the get-go.

There were some questions, too, around the added responsibility that is going to be put on the AER. There's been a lot of work done by the minister in making sure – I think it was with geothermal, bumping that up and making sure that there were added resources to the AER to make sure to be able to handle that. But my understanding as well is that there's going to be a review of the regulator which is the entire life cycle of what is happening with this particular opportunity, so within the review of the regulator I imagine that the minister has well in hand how it is that she'll be able to manage and make sure that the AER has the resources that they need. But it's such a good question, especially given the opportunities here.

I'm going to just say a few more things, but one of the things I did want to talk about is the various earth metals that we have here. The lithium that is actually in the southern part of our province is in an interesting source, and even the way that it is brought out of the ground is a really, really interesting process. I'm really looking forward to the minister talking a little bit more about that because that impacts my riding in particular and the jobs that are going to be coming out of that.

I'd spoken briefly about batteries, Mr. Speaker. In Strathmore right now there's a huge solar plant that is going forward, but one of the most interesting things about the solar plant is going to be the ability to be able to store that energy and to be able to have access to batteries. Building those batteries and being able to capture that energy is going to be a huge part of the transition going forward.

4:40

Alberta has every opportunity right now, Mr. Speaker, to be a leading edge and grasp that corner of the sector, and it really takes a lot of strength and capacity and dealing with all of the organizations that are wanting to come to Alberta right now to make sure that that sector is regulated appropriately. We have Siksika Nation in this area where some of this lithium is coming from, and I'm very excited about the discussions and the consultation that will be happening with the nation as it proposes to really bring a ton of opportunities to this wonderful group of people that is just outside of my riding.

I just want to take a moment to thank the minister for this very bold move forward. It's a lot of work, but more than that, it takes a lot of ability to bring all of those groups together to be aligned. Thank you so much for combining energy and the environment together and aligning that and finding ways forward for us to be able to diversify our sector and to really, really bring this wonderful talent into our province.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen to join debate.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act. Like my colleague on this side of the House, in first reading or a tertiary reading of the bill I'm in support of definitely the concept and the opportunity that we have. Part of the reason why I think, upon first reading, this is an important step forward is that when we look at what rare-earth elements and minerals are used in, you know, as others have commented, they're used in everything from industrial applications to consumer products: clean energy, aerospace, automotive, defence. We look at the world as far as the transition to cleaner energy, the transition to net zero, and the role that these rare-earth elements and minerals and critical minerals will have is paramount.

What's fascinating, Mr. Speaker, is that many, many years ago the U.S. used to be the largest producer of rare-earth minerals. That changed some time back, and China became the largest producer. In fact, in both 2019 and 2020 China produced 85 per cent of the world's rare earths. Now, my understanding is also that China consumes the bulk of what they produce, but if there's one thing that COVID has taught us, it's the importance of local supply chains and ensuring that we can source what we need. The fact that China is one of the largest – well, they are the largest player in this space. But the fact that they also produce the most, again, can be concerning if we are in the midst of a trade war. To be able to access what we need – again, you know, if they're controlling the bulk of the world production, then they're able to be a much bigger player in setting the price of these metals, which, again, we all recognize are quite critical.

What's fascinating to me is that Canada has some of the largest known reserves and resources of rare earths. According to the federal government's website we have over 15 million tons, so there is significant opportunity.

One of the questions that I'll have for the minister – and I appreciate that my colleagues and others that have spoken on this will have questions for the minister on this piece of legislation. I mean, has there been some work done with the Canadian government as far as looking at what and how they can support Alberta? I'm curious to know: in Canada of the amount of resources and reserves that we have country-wide, how much is Alberta home to? Now, we may not know that specific number as of yet, but I'd be curious to know and would imagine that we're one of the bigger players when it comes to how much of those rare-earth metals we have here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the opportunities are astounding. I appreciate the work that the minister has done to bring this forward. As I've often said in this Chamber, you know, I don't want to get too far ahead of myself, but at first glance of this bill I'm happy to recognize a good piece of legislation when I see it. Lord knows I have some harsh things to say about legislation I don't like, so I should be fair to say that I appreciate the work that that department has done along with the minister on this.

Again, I do have some questions and one frustration that I'll get to in a moment. I do think the AER is the correct regulator to be dealing with this. They have an abundance of experience, and I believe they are the best positioned to be able to deal with, you know, defining the regulations but also making rules around licences, liabilities, abandonment, remediation, et cetera. I mean, again, I hope one of the things that we've learned is that when looking at remediation, to ensure that Albertan citizens aren't left on the hook. Now, I do appreciate how this framework dovetails with our existing oil and gas sector. I mean, there are questions my colleagues have raised around access rights, land rights, how that works with companies. I appreciate that the AER is probably going to work this out, that there will be agreements or subleases with existing energy companies to again piggyback on the work that they're already doing, the progress and development.

I didn't see – and I appreciate that the Member for, I think, Lethbridge-East talked about five strategies, which I haven't been able to identify in the bill at the moment, so curious to know what has been articulated on the work that will be done for Indigenous consultation, Indigenous participation. I mean, we know that the current government stood up the opportunity fund. I don't know if there'll be a place for that entity to be able to support Indigenous communities to participate in this. If I missed it in the bill, I apologize. I haven't gone through every page in detail, but a reference to where that would be found would be appreciated.

Again, the AER being the sole regulator: I agree with that. I think it makes sense. My frustration, that I mentioned earlier, is that I believe there were several – I need to find it now so I don't blurt out. Three hundred employees were terminated from the AER is my understanding, and that's since the current government formed government. Now, that's a significant number. It's about 30 per cent of the employees that the AER has. Other members on this side of the House have flagged capacity. Again, when you lose or shed that many positions, I wonder if there'll be a new injection of dollars into the AER for the work that is now or will be bestowed upon them. I would love to know if the minister has that number of what we're looking at, as far as how many new positions will be made available. I know the folks at the AER do a ton of very, very critical work and want to ensure that they're not just burdened with additional work with having no new capacity. That would be fantastic.

When going through the bill, I appreciated . . . [interjection] Oh. Well, this is a great place to have an interjection. I will gladly cede the floor.

4:50

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, hon. member. In looking at capacity and trying to figure out, you know, how these mineral resources will be developed and, of course, looking at staffing models and things like that, I'm just wondering, with your experience around Alberta Innovates and, of course, now the government's announcement around their technology and innovation strategy, if you think that Alberta Innovates has the capacity to be able to support industry as they move into the expansion of this industry and their developing new innovative technologies to work within this space.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Thank you, Member, for that question. I think it's a great question, and I definitely think we – and I'll say this as a collective, previous government, current government – need to do a better job when we identify initiatives and priorities to have a whole-of-government approach. I appreciate that different ministries have their own responsibilities, but that often leads to . . .

The Acting Speaker: With about six minutes and 45 seconds left, just for clarity. You're still on that timeline. If there's another interjection, there'd be another two. It was just a mistake at the table.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that I get lost in my own thoughts and words, but I thought: there is no way that was 15 minutes; otherwise, I blacked out for a little while there.

Ms Sweet: Alberta Innovates.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. Alberta Innovates.

I think a whole-of-government approach, looking at co-ordinating what's being done in different ministries to ensure that we are moving toward an end goal, is important. I am curious to hear the minister's thoughts on a role that Alberta Innovates could play.

I do think what's exciting is that this bill has the ability – well, it does a couple of things, Mr. Speaker. It sends a signal to industry that here is an opportunity in the province. It's a priority. Again, should the entire Assembly pass this bill – and I don't want to get ahead of myself; I'm saying "should" – I think that could send a strong signal to industry as far as this being an area that Alberta already has a certain amount of expertise in, that we can leverage the expertise that we have from the energy sector that already exists to produce something that I think we'll see – I don't know. I'd be curious if the minister has a report or access to data on the demand trajectory or projections over the next five, 10, and 15 years for the use of these.

We're talking about, again, lithium batteries. If you just looked at the price of Tesla stock on its own, I mean, that would give you an indication that there is a significant demand, but we look at not just the use of it in electric vehicles but all of the other uses. The demand will be significant, and I think it's appropriate that Alberta moves into this space as quickly as possible. I am curious as well to hear what kind of timelines the minister has for, again, should this bill pass, what the AER's capacity is to get moving on this. [interjection] I see a member opposite has a comment. I will cede the floor.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member. If he doesn't mind, I would be curious if he could go back to a comment he made a couple of minutes ago about multiple governments – it doesn't matter which colour, stripe, or breed they are – working as a whole-of-government approach to this. I think he's identified a very strategic point. I think we can all acknowledge that government does tend to get siloed into ministries. If he wouldn't mind expounding upon that. I think he

has touched upon something that deserves further debate, on approaches, on how he thinks we can address that challenge that is typical of, like I said, almost every government around the world, and how they can do that approach more collectively, more collaboratively for the stability of the industry. If he wouldn't mind, I would love to hear his thoughts to expound on that.

Thank you to the member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Member, for that question. I've got a great example, and I know that the Minister of Energy would be well familiar with this. This was a frustration that we heard and I'm sure previous governments have heard as well. You know, a great example is: when we have new energy proposals or projects that are looking for approval, that need the approval of the Ministry of Environment and Parks, it can be a very, very slow process.

I think of even expanding capacity for the AER to be able to approve projects. A great example: I, you know, years ago, sat down with the former CEO of Imperial Oil. He talked about a proposal that they had in that sat for seven years, and they couldn't get an approval to move forward on the project. So guess what happened, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I'm sure you can guess what happened. They moved to Saskatchewan, and they ended up getting approvals – I think it was within six months – to move forward.

We know that when companies make these massive investments and decisions to invest, they go through their own internal processes. That can be lengthy. But when they get to that place where they are approved, we as legislators need to do everything we can to support the very entities to be able to move in a timely fashion, to carry out their due diligence. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about cutting corners but to come back to industry within a reasonable time frame. It is critical.

You know, in my former role talking to companies, especially global companies, transnationals that have a Canadian subsidiary among other countries, all of the countries are competing to bring investment to their country. This speaks to the need of having a robust framework, that companies will gain that certainty to be able to make investments. I'd be curious to hear how many companies have already reached out to the minister in favour of this and who are already seeing this as a signpost for investment in this space. [interjection] I see that my colleague has risen to make a point or a question. I'll cede the floor.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, hon. member. Going into investment and just looking at job creation and the economy, I'm curious as to what your thoughts would be around how we support our small and medium-sized businesses in research and development. We know that the IT, AI sector, all of those sectors – when we're looking at innovation and technology, obviously there is a ton of talent in Alberta that has the expertise and knowledge. Our postsecondary institutions obviously are looking at making sure that we're recruiting and that we're supporting young Albertans to not only learn here but stay here.

So, you know, what kinds of things do you think or ideas have you been hearing or thoughts that you might have in regard to: if we're looking at this industry and obviously the potential and expansion, how can we be ensuring that we're supporting those small and medium-sized firms that are working in this space to grow and expand? Are there grant programs or ideas that maybe you would have on that?

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Thank you, Member, for that question. That ties back to that original question around the role of Alberta Innovates, looking to support especially our start-ups, our SMEs to be able to participate in this space. That also goes back to the whole-of-

government approach. I would imagine that an entity like Alberta Innovates would be interested to have a conversation on what role they can play in helping when it comes to that innovation. They have some great ideas, you know, including – I love it when they put on and host competitions. We challenge the bright minds in this province to come up with solutions that are needed and then offer prizes for those solutions.

You know, my colleague pointed out an important fact, that more and more we're hearing from companies in all sectors of the talent shortage, the global talent shortage. And when we look at how the world has really shrunk decade after decade – it seems to shrink more and more and more – we're all competing for the same talent. So it's critical that governments make investments in our postsecondaries to ensure that we are growing our talent pipeline, not the opposite.

Now, again, in this space we know that we have some of the brightest minds on the planet working in our energy space. This, as I mentioned at the start, dovetails very nicely with the expertise and work that many companies are doing.

5:00

I'm excited to potentially see partnerships that will spring up, should this legislation pass, between existing oil and gas companies and new companies that are looking to use whether it's innovative technologies or previous technologies to get Alberta to participate in the global production of these rare-earth metals and minerals.

One of the things that I thought was interesting, going through the bill, was in looking at brines and waste water and how that's one of the ways to extract lithium, especially in the fact that it's left over in the water reserve. If I've understood this correctly, we can pump the water up from an existing well, filter out the lithium, and use that. I know that that regulatory framework needs to be updated because it's based on older technologies, which speaks to the fact that this is why it's so critical that the cabinet, on a regular basis, looks at previous regulations to ensure that that technology and new technology are accounted for.

Now, my understanding is that under the old regime a company that was looking to produce lithium would have to get an oil and gas tenure, which, of course, can be extremely expensive and, obviously, keep them out of the market. A wholesale review of how this legislation will apply, I think, is important. I'd also be curious to know from the minister how long her department had been working on this legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain caught my eye.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act. It should come as no surprise to members of the House that I happen to be a pretty big fan of this piece of legislation. First of all, I would like to thank the Minister of Energy for her incredibly hard work in getting us to this point so far. Bill 82 is part of a broad and thorough critical and rare-earth mineral strategy called renewing Alberta's mineral future. I'm honoured to have participated with the minister and her team on this strategy over the past year.

Critical minerals have always been an interest of mine. Before getting into politics on the municipal level, I worked as a dual-ticketed tradesman working in various industrial construction sites around Alberta as well as in technology sales for a large Fortune 500 company. Now, a lot of the products that I sold required specific minerals and materials to operate, and I always hoped for the day when Alberta would be in a position to produce those minerals. That is why I'm so excited to see this legislation put forth

and how much of a game changer it can be to Alberta's resource sector. After years of economic troubles for our province, this legislation will lead to the economic rejuvenation of the province, and Alberta is very well positioned to take advantage of this opportunity.

For far too long Alberta has neglected the abundance of critical and rare-earth minerals that we possess. Alberta's focus has been on energy-related minerals: oil, natural gas, and coal. Now, that has not necessarily been a bad thing, and many families in Alberta have reaped the benefits of those three sectors. Specifically, the oil and gas industry has been the bedrock of Alberta's economy and has employed hundreds of thousands of Albertans and lifted communities out of poverty while ensuring energy security for North America. Unfortunately, little attention has gone to critical and rare-earth minerals, and there has been little incentive for investors and companies to invest in the development of these other critical resources.

This is, you know, partially because the regulatory system has not been in place for this mining, which has resulted in an arduous process for investors that puts them at much greater financial risk than if they were to invest in energy-related resource development such as oil. Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act, addresses these fiscal and regulatory issues by establishing the Alberta Energy Regulator, or AER, as the full life cycle regulator for metallic and industrial minerals. This will streamline the responsibility of regulatory oversight to the AER, and in conjunction with the Responsible Energy Development Act it will provide the AER the authority to regulate these minerals to ensure their safe, efficient, orderly, and responsible development.

Amendments will be made to the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, the Pipeline Act, and the Geothermal Resource Development Act to clarify the exclusions and applications of these statutes with respect to the development of mineral resources and the ability to address any potential regulatory gaps or overlaps. Amendments will also be made to the Natural Resources Conservation Board Act to remove the mandate of the Natural Resources Conservation Board and move its public interest decision-making role for major mineral resource projects to the AER.

These amendments will ensure that the AER has specific powers related to orphan assets management and liability closure, resource equity, resource development, and that the applications of other energy resource enactments are enumerated to align with overall government policy. Included in these provisions are obligations of licensees and approval holders that relate to liability management, remedial action, and compliance oversight and enforcement. All this will provide regulatory clarity for industry while ensuring responsible resource development and conservation, public safety, and environmental protection.

Mr. Speaker, some constituents that are listening in today may be wondering why developing this critical and rare-earth mineral industry is so important to Alberta. The answer to that is quite simple: these minerals are fundamental to most of the products that we use every day and for renewable energy products that Canada and the world need to get to a lower carbon economy.

We have lithium, which is needed for lithium-ion batteries, greases, and pharmaceuticals. We have nickel, which is needed in magnets, rechargeable batteries, steel, and super alloys. We have titanium, used in metal alloys and pigments; vanadium, used for catalysts, alloys, and energy storage; and zinc, used in steel plating, alloys, paints, rubber, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. We have uranium, needed for nuclear fuel, another source of clean energy, and rare-earth elements which are used in wind turbines, clean technologies, batteries, and electronics. Diamonds, iron, potash,

and zirconium: the list goes on and on. We have it all here in Alberta.

Manufacturers from across Canada and North America currently must import these minerals from overseas to produce many of the products that we rely on every single day. We import them from Australia. We import them from China and numerous African nations that have questionable human rights and environmental records.

You know, I remember working in these industrial construction sites in years past, and I remember trainload after trainload of rare rock, potash coming from other jurisdictions, and I kept thinking: why is it that we can't produce those minerals right here in the province of Alberta versus bringing them in from other jurisdictions? Specifically, Agrium Redwater has trains coming in, a train car daily, bringing in rocks, materials, and potash from Africa. Sherritt Gordon up in Fort Saskatchewan, where I spent years working, has, again, train cars coming from all over the world supplying these goods so that we can manufacture. Why can't we produce that here in Alberta? We have these minerals in our own backyard, and we should have the regulatory processes in place to be able to begin developing them in an environmentally safe manner.

These minerals are not just used for the everyday products we rely on, but they're also used for clean technology such as solar panels, wind turbines, and others. Clean energy and technology have increasingly become more efficient and cost-effective, which has raised the demand for these minerals. These technologies will be essential in the decades to come as more and more governments and businesses from across the world work towards a low-carbon economy.

If you support the environment, you want to vote for Bill 82. If you want to transition away from hydrocarbons, you want to vote for Bill 82. If you want to diversify the economy here in Alberta, you want to vote for Bill 82. If you want to support a jurisdiction that has a strong human rights record, vote for Bill 82. If you want to support jurisdictions that ensure equality and justice for all, vote for Bill 82. And if you want new industries to prosper, creating great-paying jobs and generating more provincial revenue, vote for Bill 82. We have the opportunity to become a secure and environmentally safe source of these minerals, which, in turn, helps the environment and creates new, great-paying jobs for Albertans, which is why I urge everyone in this House today to vote for Bill 82.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen to join the debate.

5:10

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act. Other than singing "support Bill 82," I just want to say, to start off, that I'm open to interventions, and I can be a little bit clunky with them, so bear with me if you want to do that. I really appreciate the back and forth in the debate, and I welcome them.

I want to start by talking about critical materials and the relationship we have in Alberta with other jurisdictions around North America. I know that when we were in government, I was a delegate for Alberta for PNWER, which is the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region. I know that within PNWER there were many cross-jurisdictional conversations that happened, ways that the jurisdictions were able to communicate and support each other. For those that aren't familiar with PNWER, I'll just give a little bit of a briefing on what it is. It's the states of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon,

Montana, Washington, and the Canadian provinces of B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. They have a mission of basically increasing economic well-being and quality of life while maintaining and enhancing our natural environment.

Being a representative for Alberta with PNWER, I found it to be an incredible experience. We were able to discuss strategies. We were able to discuss issues that were relevant to the different provinces and territories and states. When I'm reviewing this piece of legislation, when I look at some of the resources, the minerals that Alberta has, one of them is potash. Immediately it made me think of PNWER and some of the work that was done there.

One of the strategies that came out of PNWER was having a cross-jurisdictional strategy for how to address zebra mussels. They are an invasive species that can negatively impact our waterways, and when we looked at some of the critical minerals that we could use, one of them was potash. Winnipeg, unfortunately, had an infestation of the zebra mussel. At PNWER there was a conversation across all these jurisdictions about how best to eradicate them and to support Winnipeg in dealing with that, and potash was one of the minerals that was discussed as a way to collaborate and to potentially get rid of these invasive species.

Not only was the communication between the jurisdictions essential, but it created a strategy that made all of the jurisdictions communicate. When one region noticed an issue, they were able to come up with kind of a universal strategy on how best to support not only the eradication of the zebra mussel but a strategy that would essentially prevent zebra mussels from invading our jurisdictions. Alberta had an incredible policy when it came to this. They had dogs that sniffed out the zebra mussel. There was an education system about when you're using your boat in different waterways, when you're crossing borders, when you're looking at transporting perhaps a new boat coming in, and there were stations all across the province, especially at the border crossings, that looked at ways to detect potential zebra mussels in a way that would ensure that our waterways were protected.

I talk about PNWER because what they do is support each other in ways to develop their economy, and they come up with strategies to support each other. When we look at what PNWER was talking about this summer at their Montana summit, one of the key speaking opportunities and seminars was about the U.S.-Canada binational relationship for strategic and critical mineral supply chains. When we're in this Legislature and we're talking about the Mineral Resource Development Act, I'm curious about: what information was taken from PNWER and put into this legislation? There are other jurisdictions that have these minerals. Are they taking advice from perhaps other jurisdictions that are already doing it and doing it well? Are there opportunities for us to perhaps learn from those other jurisdictions, take that information and put it into our legislation to make sure that things like the surface rights and if there's a disagreement for a landowner perhaps, how those different things are being adjudicated, how they're being laid out? Instead of starting from scratch, I would suspect that some of the jurisdictions involved in PNWER already have, if not this legislation, similar legislation. Was there an opportunity to take some of the information from PNWER and bring it forward into this legislation to make sure that we're doing something that already exists? [interjection] I see a member wanting to intervene, and I'm happy to give way.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite. I appreciate her sharing her experiences with PNWER. I think that is very helpful, actually, to talk about that cross-jurisdictional knowledge and learning. I myself have been

assigned or appointed to the Council of State Governments – West and Midwest, very similar partnerships and agreements, and have taken part in a number of virtual meetings where that kind of conversation also is very robust. I know that a lot of those jurisdictions have in fact indicated that they're actually looking for leadership from Alberta as well, so it is a two-way street. I do hope that the minister will speak more to that information. My question there is: in the member's time with PNWER is she also of the opinion that Alberta has shown a lot of leadership in that role and the things that we have done very well here to take care of it, and what will it take to get her to sing: vote Bill 82?

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much to the member for that. I think it's wonderful when we have member involvement in the many different opportunities across the province to engage in other jurisdictions. I absolutely think Alberta has a leadership role, and I think that when there are areas where we can, I think we should. I think that part of that leadership is looking to other regions and to other areas to see what they've done, maybe the mistakes that they've made so we don't do that, and then taking some of the strategies or ideas that our stakeholders have brought forward and then implementing those. When it comes to Alberta, there is absolutely leadership that can occur here. I just want to make sure that they're doing it correctly the first time.

When I look at this piece of legislation and we look at what the AER responsibilities are going to be, I have some concerns. I know that when we're rolling this out and we have this expectation that's being put on the AER – we know that this government has laid off around 300 employees from the AER, which is about 30 per cent of their employment. So how are they justifying putting more work on to them and not hiring to backfill that? When they're coming up with a strategy about how this is going to roll out and who's responsible for it, is that being considered? Are other jurisdictions similar to who's responsible?

Do they have more detail in their legislation? I mean, when we look at this legislation, again we have a government telling us: don't worry; it will be developed in the regulations. I worry that this regulation promise from this government has a lot of things that are potentially detrimental to perhaps landowners, for example. We've heard from landowners that there are some concerns. What if there's a discrepancy? What if there is some sort of concern that they have? What's the process? Were they consulted on what the process was? I know that when there have been surface rights concerns, you know, landowners are very clear about what they need. Is that being transferred into this piece of legislation? If it is, why isn't it written clearly in the legislation? Why isn't there a process that's laid out clearly for how a landowner can review a claim or express any sort of appeal or whatever's going on?

5:20

The other piece of this legislation that I find concerning is the lack of Indigenous consultation. When it comes to land rights, I know that one of the most important things that we as a province should be doing is consulting with those that own the land and are part of that land on how we want to access and use that land. It has to be a conversation. It has to be an agreement. It can't be: we're government; we're coming in because we said so. There are so many potential opportunities here to create an agreement between First Nation communities, Indigenous communities and the outcomes for developing minerals that we need to see. It just needs to be done properly, and I would hope that that consultation has been sufficient in terms of the Indigenous communities and that they would report that they feel quite happy with how things have gone. [interjection] I would like to give way to the member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member again. I think she raised a very honourable and very important question, that that consultation with our First Nations and Indigenous populations is done well and done comprehensively. I do believe that in the materials I've received, some of that has been done.

I think one of the points to consider is that the Alberta Energy Regulator, a key part in this, does have a fairly long track record in some of that consultation and process, and that component needs to be added into it, not that it's perfect, not that it couldn't use further correction, but I believe that is a significant component to this.

I just wanted to allow the member to continue on and say how important that piece is for the development of our First Nations and their prosperity but all of Alberta as we learn to collaborate, and I just wish that she would continue on speaking those important words for the record.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the member for that. I agree a hundred per cent that the Indigenous consultation is essential, and without it I don't think this legislation could move forward.

I know that there are other sort of land agreements that are part of the province, one of them being with the Canadian Armed Forces. We have Canadian Armed Forces bases throughout the province, and there are significant agreements that happen between some of the oil and gas companies and the property that the CAF has not only with land and land use for the oil and gas but air space, specifically over Cold Lake. We also have agreements between the CAF and Indigenous communities when it comes to hunting and gathering berries and those types of things.

When it comes to consultation, was the CAF consulted with on how that access would look? Is that something that we're going to leave up to the AER to develop later, or is this something that we should be getting ahead of and having these conversations ahead of time? Those agreements already exist when it comes to access onto property for reasons of oil and gas and Indigenous communities doing hunting and such. I know that, you know, there are different pockets throughout the province where these mineral resources are, and I'm curious: have those bigger conversations happened, and how robust were they? Were they . . . [interjection] I see an hon. member would like to intervene, and I'd like to give way.

Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Oh. Okay. Thank you. I appreciate it. I guess your questions lead into something that I fundamentally wonder about with this legislation, and that is: does Bill 82 expand the scope of the sale of mineral rights in different parts of the province, right? I mean, you mentioned something I never even thought of, which is the considerable Canadian Armed Forces lands and, like, who owns the mineral rights and the substrata of those places, their weapons range and so forth in Suffield. Does Bill 82 somehow clarify? If, let's say, an individual or a company has the mineral rights to energy development, does that also allow them the whole range of mineral development in that same area? We see that lithium is one area where these two things intersect, but are there others like that?

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the hon. member. I mean, those are great questions. I think it's something that we should have information on.

When we talk about landowners and who owns the land, I think it's important to hear about the concerns of the liabilities on those landowners. Whether it's private property, whether it's Indigenous property, or whether it's Canadian Armed Forces property, was there an analysis done on potentially the increased impact of critical

mineral mining on these landowners? Who has the right perhaps to veto some of this mining? Has that conversation occurred? When it comes to the landowners, I think that as government we don't want to come in and tell them how it's going to be done. We need to make sure that they're consulted with, that their conversations are robust, and that there is an agreement between the government and the landowner or the entity responsible for that property.

I know that specifically with the Canadian Armed Forces, sometimes it could be cumbersome because it's not just the base commander; it has to go up to Ottawa. There are big conversations that happen regarding permits and access and training. We know that the Canadian Armed Forces is continuously training and using the space where they are set up to do many different things, many different exercises throughout the province, whether it's land based or in the air. There are a whole bunch of things to consider.

I'm curious if there has been any sort of analysis done on what that would look like, if there has been any sort of economic impact on what that would look like. Just because the mineral is there doesn't mean that the government can come in and dictate that it needs to be mined. There are procedures and processes that should be in place, and I would hope that those conversations have happened; however, it's unclear. When we look at this government saying, you know, "Don't worry; some of this stuff is going to be filtered out in the regulations," well, we've heard loud and clear that there isn't a lot of trust with this government, especially with transparency.

When we look at how they've done their consulting, you know, we haven't seen a what-we-heard report. That would be wonderful for us, to be able to review and look at what some of the feedback has been, because we're hearing concerns about liabilities from landowners, and I would imagine that those same concerns are part of that report. Is it something that's going to be made public? Is it something that we can look at to make sure that any of the concerns are actually part of the legislation as opposed to just being promised to be regulated down the road?

I think that when it comes to something that we have as a natural resource here in the province, absolutely we should be looking at ways to benefit. We need to look at ways to diversify our economy, something that, you know, this government has said over and over that they want to do, yet we haven't seen actual planning to do that. I think that there is absolutely a wonderful opportunity here, but there are just so many questions that aren't answered and concerns that are being raised. I would hope that this government wants to get it right, that they want to make sure that, you know, they're setting up AER to be successful, that landowners are happy, Indigenous communities are happy, Canadian Armed Forces are happy, that this Bill 82 is actually a piece of legislation that is going to move Alberta forward in the economic landscape and that we're actually able to mine and get our product to the world market. I think it's essential that we look at ways to diversify, and I think this is a great opportunity. I'm just curious why there are so many details that are left to regulation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to speak to Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act. I've appreciated the conversation, from both sides, that we've heard so far this afternoon and getting close into the evening here, primarily

around the opportunities that critical and rare-earth minerals are going to have for Alberta.

I do want to echo comments that we've heard quite often in this House, but the fact is, you know, that this was a government that came into power – and specifically I believe it was the Minister of Finance that took the opportunity to remind Albertans, in his opinion, that diversification was a luxury and that we wouldn't necessarily go down that path. I appreciate that maybe there's been some course correction from the UCP, from the government, so we're starting to see important pieces like Bill 82 coming forward. While I do have some concerns that echo quite similarly to some of the comments that we've heard already this evening, which I will likely share as well, I am happy to see this put forward in consideration of opportunities that lie ahead of us in terms of emerging technologies and ones that are already before us.

I guess, in the first place, I would just like to point out the fact that, at the end of the day, the most important part when we are talking about making this process go through the AER is that we are ensuring that the AER is, I guess, first of all, able to handle the new workload, the new casework that would come from this legislation. As has been said, we have seen, since this government came into power, 300 or so staff relieved of their positions in the AER, which is deeply concerning on several levels. Of course, this is an organization that is so fundamental to ensuring that we see projects moving forward and ensuring that there is a transparent process in place, so I'm very concerned when we talk about giving them more work but at the same time having fewer people to do that work.

Again, the most important part through any process that is going through an environmental or energy regulator is that that transparency and accountability is there. I would also mention, Mr. Speaker, that in May 2020 we saw this government pass – sorry; I don't remember when it was passed, but it was introduced in May 2020 – Bill 7, which gave this UCP government and cabinet the power to set their own deadlines for project approvals.

At the time the critic for that file raised concerns, first of all stating that it is important that we see these processes as streamlined as possible, but the fact is that this government giving itself the ability to set, potentially and arguably, arbitrary deadlines is always going to be a concern for us any time we talk about giving more power to the ministers. We've seen it time and time again from this government, and I don't think that we've seen any clarification of the minister's responsibility or if the minister or cabinet have taken action to set deadlines or move projects forward before they had potentially gone through a rigorous process. I hope not, but it is an important thing to consider as we are talking about giving more responsibility to the AER through Bill 82, the Mineral Resource Development Act.

We've heard a lot of conversation, again, about opportunities with rare-earth minerals, and I would just echo some of the things that we've heard, that, you know, this is an industry that is booming already but is going to no doubt explode into the future. I know that we have all likely heard about semiconductor shortages, for instance, which have caused major shortages and concerns in terms of production of vehicles across Canada or at least getting those vehicles to market here in Canada. The headline that I have before me here says that "semiconductor microchips are the toilet paper of 2021."

I think that anyone who may be out looking for a vehicle or may be working in a vehicle sales facility likely understands the concerns that are here, where, when we're talking about potentially \$40,000 vehicles, a \$1 microchip or semiconductor chip could be holding back production of these vehicles. We've heard this afternoon in debate that primarily China has the monopoly on

processing these semiconductors. It's an important conversation moving forward, and mineral resources and rare-earth minerals are an important piece of that conversation as well.

I would also like to reflect on the fact that while we are today talking about how we put in a process or put a process in place to extract these minerals, an important starting block for that conversation, we must also consider what the next steps are going to be. You know, it's one thing to extract these resources, but what are we going to do after that extraction has happened?

Whether we're reflecting on oil and gas processing, whether we're reflecting on agriculture, the conversation around value-added continues to come to the forefront. I think it's important, as we are considering legislation and moving forward on regulations, that we're also talking about: is this going to be enough to ensure that we're prepared for the next steps when we start talking about value-added? I don't think that we should wait another decade until we start having those conversations, you know, specifically when we talk about wanting to manufacture products here ourselves, whether it's the future prospects of manufacturing electric vehicles or other processing things potentially for computers or whatever it might be.

Again, we see this legislation clarifying that the AER is going to be the sole regulator for mineral resources. It covers hardrock in brines, and in many cases parts relevant to wells apply to brines and mine sections apply to hardrocks, which is maybe not very straightforward. But the fact is that, you know, we need to ensure that there is a separate process, separate from what we already see in place, to ensure that companies have the ability to extract these products and that we have the framework in place and the groundwork in place to ensure that the capital that is sitting out there already is prepared to move forward. They need that framework in place.

Again, while I support – I think that based on the conversations that we've had already around this legislation, I do support what we're seeing here, but I do also share the concerns of my colleague. I know that the Member for Edmonton-North West, I believe – sorry. I'm going to confuse my constituencies now. Maybe Edmonton-Castle Downs . . .

Mr. Bilous: Castle Downs.

Mr. Carson: Thank you.

. . . raised the point around section 35, I believe, regarding Indigenous consultations. While I appreciate that we had a member from the government stand up and discuss that indeed Indigenous consultation had taken place, the fact is that we don't see that articulated within Bill 82 specifically, and that's always a concern for us. Not sure if that piece is going to be further discussed through the regulations, but I think it's important when we are talking about resource development, whether in oil and gas or, in this instance, rare-earth mineral development, that they are involved in those conversations, that they feel that they have a seat at the table. I think that, as much as we can, we should ensure that that is enshrined, as has been set out by section 35 and the need for Indigenous consultation with communities.

5:40

I would love to hear from the government or from the respective minister what process took place in terms of Indigenous consultation, if it did indeed, as the government says that it did. Let us know what that process looked like. I think it's also important that we, if possible, have a what-we-heard document produced by the government. We see in many instances that being the case when legislation comes forward from this government. I think that the opposition

wants to know. I think that all Albertans should be given the opportunity to see how that consultation looked and after that fact decide if they believe that it was fulsome, transparent, and accountable.

I did hear in the comments from the member from I want to say Chestermere – I'm sorry. It's been a bit of a long day. Oh, my gosh. I'm going to lose my spot here, Mr. Speaker. I apologize.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Carson: Not ready for the question.

I'll come back to that.

But I did also reflect on the point that we discussed earlier. I believe it was me that brought up the fact around liability, and when capital is looking for places to invest or when organizations are looking for places to invest, more and more they are looking at environmental standards and the long-term prospects of ensuring that things are done to the highest environmental standards. I think that through this legislation we have a starting block for that through the AER and their ability to do this work. I think that these are good stepping stones, but again we need to ensure that when we are giving more work to the AER, they are ensuring that they have the structures in place to move forward in a transparent way. I again raise concerns that we have seen this government make some major cuts to that organization.

I do look forward to hearing more from the government on potentially the consultation process that took place. There is indeed no doubt a need to see this move forward. As we've heard earlier, the World Bank has predicted a 500 per cent increase by 2050 in the production of minerals. I don't think that by any means we should continue to let these opportunities go to other jurisdictions when we have these minerals in our backyard. As long as we are doing everything we can to live up to the high environmental standards that the world markets expect of us, this is a real opportunity for us, whether we are, again, talking about the opportunities in semiconductors of cars, of electric vehicles, of, you know, something that is important to me, computers and PCs.

There's no doubt that there's been a global shortage of semiconductors for graphics cards and processors for computers. We've seen a real fight for the supply chain. We're seeing products, you know, going upwards of 50 to 300 per cent over the original cost of these products because people are trying so hard to get their hands on them. We continue to have supply chain issues. Not everyone is at the top of the line for getting those semiconductors when they need them. We see, I believe, on average, a wait time of about 12 weeks to get some of these semiconductors, and now we're moving into 25 or more weeks. This is going to be a real supply chain issue into the future if we don't do our best to get our foot in the door and ensure that we are taking part in this phenomenon.

Mr. Speaker, with that, again, I look forward to hearing more about this conversation, what the next steps might be after potentially, if passed, Bill 82 is put into place. I'm very excited about it. I think Alberta is well situated to be a leader in this resource extraction, but I hope that we, again, are considering what it means for processing and value-added after that fact.

Mr. Speaker, with that, again I would like to say that I am happy to support this legislation in terms of what it means for diversification of our province, what it means for bringing in more capital to our province, and what it means for the future as we move towards net zero.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure to rise and to speak to this piece of legislation. I think from an economic diversification perspective there's a lot of potential in what this legislation can do, but at the same time what we know could already happen prior to this legislation – although I appreciate that this legislation is being introduced in the House. Really, the idea of bringing everything under one piece of legislation is, I think, a housekeeping piece and obviously will create a pathway for investors to be able to understand that it's more of a one-stop shop than having to go to different places to access and understand the regulatory process and what ministry do they talk to and what department do they talk to and all of those things.

I appreciate that that is the intent of this legislation, which is just basically to bring it all under one house and to give the AER the ability to make sure that the access to the minerals are not in competition with other types of oil and gas exploration and different exploration that's happening within the province. I do find it a little bit strange that coal is not included, and the only reason that I say that is because coal is actually the one mineral that Alberta is well known for, and it's one of our biggest exports of minerals in this province when you compare it to other jurisdictions across the country.

In fact, when we look at the reference material even that the province has used in relation to mining in Canada, when you look at the breakdown of the maps, the only thing that mining Canada talks about for Alberta minerals at this moment is coal. The one major piece that is what Alberta is known for and the part that the federal government and mining Canada is actually advocating and supporting from an industry perspective when it comes to mining is the one piece that is actually not included in this piece of legislation, which is a little bit counter to the fact that when we look at what the government is talking about, it's about that partnership between all of the different provinces, the territories, and the federal governments and how we can create a mining community to attract investment into the country and to create a battery network where we can be looking at how we're going to make sure that the mining materials that are being used are actually going to be value-added within the provinces to create the very batteries and lithium that we're talking about.

Yet, again, the one piece that the federal piece has highlighted for Alberta has been coal. Now, in saying that, I mean, I think it's a signal to investors that there are other minerals in the province and there are other things that can be mined here and there's a lot of potential, but why the government would exclude coal out of this piece of legislation and under the umbrella of mining and making sure that industry has a one-stop shop when it comes to this investment seems a little odd.

I get the argument that, you know, the Coal Conservation Act is under review and all of these things and that's why the government didn't do it, but then I guess my thought would be: are we going to get back into the old behaviour of this government, which means that in about six months we're going to reopen up this piece of legislation and coal is going to get added in? That seems to be the government trend, that bills and legislation just keep getting reopened again: oh, we forgot something; now we should put that in there. It actually counters the whole idea of making sure that there are regulatory processes and that industry knows that there's consistency and that the AER has the rules and regulations in place that are needed.

Now, something I did want to look at and the questions that I have for the government when it comes to this piece of legislation: the ability to mine minerals in Alberta has already existed prior to this piece of legislation. It's not new. All this is is really housekeeping and bringing everything under one umbrella, yet

what we see by this government is Renewing Alberta's Mineral Future: a Strategy to Re-energize Alberta's Minerals Sector. Great document. It's long. It's got lots and lots of pages. The part about it that I don't think I understand is that we see this document that's accompanied by this piece of legislation in the press release; there's no document or link that says what we've heard, which is unique because in every other piece of legislation that's been introduced so far in this session there's been a what-we-heard document, yet for some reason this piece of legislation doesn't have that, so the consultation and how this document was created is an unknown.

5:50

The other piece about it is knowing that this could happen and that there was potential in Alberta for this to happen. We're now two years into this government's mandate, and the very document that's talking about the future of mining in Alberta, the first action item, which is immediate, isn't for another two years, and that includes creating a public geoscience mechanism, which federally we already have. For those who don't know – because I believe I heard that the hon. member across the way at one point wanted to know what “geoscience” meant – basically, the geoscience programs map out where our minerals are in the province. It's a public document, which means that industry doesn't have to pay and they don't necessarily have to explore because the government has already done the mapping for them. It's a way to encourage investment, for sure, and it helps identify the critical and strategic minerals within the province so companies will invest. They already know where to go. They're able to map that out. That's great.

Other jurisdictions already do it. Federally it's already done, yet within the next two years, not six months, not nine months, nothing, two years from now, this government hopes to have a plan for a public geoscience program with mapping done. The investment that we've been talking about all afternoon, the potential to be able to start mining these materials, may not actually happen for two years because if not, then a company is going to have to go do that mapping and they're going to have to pay for the mapping to have the access, so we're already seeing a barrier here about how to get that capital into the province because we're already behind Saskatchewan and Manitoba, who already have it done, so that's a concern.

It's a concern because for two years the government had the capacity to do this. Mining in Alberta could have happened already, yet it hasn't happened because we don't have the mechanism in place . . . [interjection] I'll give way.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. I appreciate that. It's okay. You know, directly relating to that very thing – I mean, this is what I've been concerned about all afternoon. We're creating a way by which we can expand our mineral extraction, which is great. I think it's a good idea. But, you know, my question is, like: where is that concentrated mineable asset that we can start with? I mean, I know that we probably have one of the best subterranean drilling of core samples of any place in the world because of all of the 70 or more years of oil and gas drilling that's taken place, so we have those core samples available. I mean, let's not confuse creating the positive environment for extracting minerals from the fact of just how much is there potentially as a dollar value to be able to actually utilize and exploit.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Member. I don't think I actually have to give way; I just feel like that's part of the rules here, so anyway. I was on a roll.

Well, I think it's a great question. I mean, as I was saying, the reality of it is that based on the government document that's been

publicly released, we actually don't have the geoscience program established yet, so the mineral mapping for the critical and the strategic minerals has not been done. That's going to happen in the next two years, so that's good. I mean, two years in, two years out. We're halfway there. Maybe we'll get there soon.

Now, the other piece around this that I think is very important. Obviously, my colleagues have talked about the Indigenous consultation piece, so I won't get too far into that, but if we look at the next level of engagement that the government has put in their document, so for the interim, so not even in the next two years but the next two to five years, the government is going to increase public geoscience, enhance the fiscal and regulatory environment. So although the AER part is in here, apparently there is more to do, updating life cycles of metallic and industrial mineral regulations, so the regulations, even though the government has said that this is going to set those regulations and rules in place, apparently in the next two to five years those are going to change according to this document, the very document the government released. Exploring “policy and other tools available to the government to . . . encourage mineral exploration and development”: well, I think, going again, we need to make sure we have the public geoscience in place. We don't. That's two to five years out. Hopefully, we'll get to encourage more exploration.

Then we're going to update the royalty framework, so if something happens – let's say that we get some capital investment in the province for minerals. We start having some of that exploration happening. There's some revenue being created out of some of this exploration. The very royalty framework – again, let's remind everybody: this is public good. These minerals, no different than oil and gas, actually belong to the public good, but we're not going to have under this framework a royalty framework for two to five years, so if there's anything happening in the next two to five years, that royalty payment doesn't necessarily exist yet. Fundamental problem. Albertans should be concerned about that. That needs to be done. That needs to be done before any contracts are signed to say: “You know what? The Crown will allow this to continue.”

The royalty piece, the payback to the taxpayer, needs to be put in place, not two to five years from now. That's a huge flaw in the framework of this legislation and could've already been put in place. The review and the updating of this needs to be not done in two to five years; it needs to be done, like, ASAP because if this is about getting capital investment happening in the province, I don't disagree. Getting people back to work, getting some revenue happening, working on what we need to be able to keep the province moving forward: totally support it. But the royalty framework needs to be established to make sure that this doesn't turn into something where the taxpayers aren't getting the value for the very resource that belongs to them and that these companies aren't able to sign on to contracts where they're not paying for the very value that Albertans have a right to have access to. That's two to five years out.

Promoting responsible development: two to five years out. I'm going to give the government the benefit of the doubt that that's just going to be a continuation of what we're already doing. We're not going to wait two to five years for that because we know that responsible development happens in Alberta. It's just another framework.

Then we look at long term, five to 10 years: promoting innovation and industrial development. We want to leverage Alberta's industrial and scientific capacity in five to 10 years. There's so much potential in Alberta today with our postsecondary institutions, with the IT, with the amount of people that want to come to Alberta and work on tech. The fact that we are an oil and gas province and

that that institutional knowledge already exists when it comes to drilling and access: we should be able to leverage the industrial and scientific capacity way sooner than five to 10 years. These are really long, lofty goals for a piece of legislation that is housekeeping something that could have already been done over the last two.

So I have questions. Obviously, I recognize I'm running out of time for today, but I'd be curious, when we move into Committee of the Whole and we keep talking about these, when we look at the strategic plan that the government has put out in regard to the mineral sector, why it is that these targeted goals for two years, five to 10 years were so far out. Again, I think my biggest highlight of the whole thing would be the royalty component. That framework needs to be established. That review needs to be done immediately

because we do know that the future is in minerals and that Alberta can be a powerhouse when it comes to it. We need to make sure that Albertans are getting the money for their resources, simplistically, and that it doesn't turn into something where we're reviewing it in five years or 10 years and we're seeing that – you know what? – we could have had money coming back to the taxpayer a long time ago and that we lost out on our value for our product that belongs to all of them.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. It is 6 o'clock. We are adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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